

ANCIENT KANESH

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Mogens Trolle Larsen is Emeritus Professor of Assyriology at the University of Copenhagen. He has written books and articles on Assyriology and archaeology and has edited a number of volumes. His book *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an Antique Land* was published in 1996. He is a member of the American Philosophical Society, Academia Europea, and the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters.

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Living as we do upon the uppermost layer of a profound
compilation – one, that is, of wind, shadow, of voices buffeted
by other voices – we need to feel that this residency has been
“underwritten” by antecedents: that we, the living, are continuously
accompanied by the presence, no matter how remote, of
predecessors. That we’re not, finally, alone.

Gustaf Sobin, *Luminous Debris*

ANCIENT KANESH

A Merchant Colony in Bronze Age Anatolia



MOGENS TROLLE LARSEN

University of Copenhagen



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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107119567

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First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Larsen, Mogens Trolle.

Ancient Kanesh : a merchant colony in bronze age Anatolia / Mogens Trolle Larsen.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-107-11956-7 (hardback)

1. Merchants – Turkey. 2. Turkey – Commerce – History. 3. Kanesh (Extinct city)
4. Excavations (Archaeology) – Turkey – Kültepe Site. 5. Turkey – Antiquities. I. Title.

HF5475.T92L37 2015

939'.34-dc23 2015016123

ISBN 978-1-107-11956-7 Hardback

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PREFACE

In dedicating this book to my old friend and colleague Klaas Veenhof, I wish to honour a scholar who has contributed more than anyone else to our understanding of the Old Assyrian period. His books and many articles constitute the essential foundation for anyone who wishes to tackle this sub-field of Assyriology, and his brilliant scholarly competence, his energy, kindness and unfailing generosity have benefitted many young and older scholars. It is a great pleasure for me personally to express my gratitude for his friendship.

Anyone who might be interested in proceeding from this book to a deeper study and understanding of the period and especially the texts will have to turn to his monograph of 2008 (Veenhof and Eidem 2008), in which he has set out a coherent scholarly interpretation of the Old Assyrian period.

The Old Assyrian Text Project has united many specialists in a collaborative effort to reach a deeper understanding of the period (Veenhof, Dercksen, Michel, Kryszat, Stratford). Our regular meetings and the openness and willingness to share ideas and texts have been a constant source of inspiration. The Old Assyrian “team” in Copenhagen, where no less than five PhDs have been written concentrating on Old Assyrian topics, has benefited from the constant support of the Carlsberg Foundation. Karen Jensen, Gojko Barjamovic, Thomas Hertel, Agnete Wisti Lassen, Xiaowen Shi and Edward Stratford all deserve my rich gratitude for their ideas, their enthusiasm and their striving for the highest academic standard in their work. Stephen Lumsden and Thomas Hertel provided crucial help in the preparation of the manuscript.

I must also acknowledge the kind support I have received from Turkish colleagues; when Tahsin Özgüç was still alive, I enjoyed his hospitality at Kültepe and in Ankara and had many fruitful conversations with him. His successor at the excavation, Professor Fikri Kulakoğlu, has given me all the support I could hope for, and I have enjoyed many enlightening discussions

with him. I am grateful also for the friendly reception I have received at Ankara University by my colleagues there, especially Professors Cahit Günbattı, İrfan Albayrak and Hakan Erol.

The two readers of the manuscript helped improve my text in several ways. A special thanks to Lotte and Kristian for their encouragement and help.

CHRONOLOGY

Date	Assur	Anatolia	Babylonia
2300	Assur temple – Ishtar temple		Akkadian dynasty
...			
		City-state culture	
2250		Old Palace built at Kanesh	
...			
2200			
...			
2150			
...			
2100	Ur III control		Ur III dynasty
2050			
2000	Old Assyrian period Šilulu Erishum I Year eponymy (year 1)		Isin-Larsa period
1950	Ikunum Sargon I	Texts at Kanesh	
1900	Puzur-Assur II Naram-Suen		
1850	Erishum II	End of level 2 (ca. year 140) Warshama palace built	
1800	Shamshi-Adad I		Hammurabi of Babylon

Eponym	Year	King in Assur	Events
I	1972	Erishum I (1972–1933)	Year eponymy starts
...			
25			
30			
35			
40	1932	Ikūnum (1932–1918)	
45			
50			First dated text
55	1917	Sargon (1917–1878)	
60			
65			
70			
75			Beginning of extensive documentation
80			
85			
90			
95	1877	Puzur-Assur II (1877–1870)	
100			
105	1869	Naram-Suen (1869–1836 + x)	Death of several important merchants
110			Drop in number of texts
115			
120			Week eponymy abolished
125			
130			
135			End of level 2
140	1835	Naram-Suen/Erishum II	Level 1b – Warshama palace built
145			
150			
155			
160	1815	Erishum II (–1809)	
165	1808	Shamshi-Adad I (1808–1776)	Amorite dynasty controls Assur
170			
175			
180			
185	1790		Inar king at Kanesh
190			
195			
200	1776	Shamshi-Adad dies	Warshama king
...			
255+	1718+	End of eponym list	Last datable texts

INTRODUCTION

IN THE YEAR 1880 BC, LET US SAY, AN OLD MAN WAS SITTING IN THE shade of an olive tree in the courtyard of his house in a city called Assur, busily composing a letter. He was writing on a small clay tablet, holding it in the palm of his hand and pressing a stylus into the moist and soft surface, making complex signs in a writing system we now call cuneiform – because the individual elements in the script look like wedges, *cunes* in Latin (see Figure 1). The man’s name was Assur-idi, and he was writing to his son Assur-nada, who at the time was conducting his own affairs some 1,000 kilometres away, in central Anatolia in a town called Kanesh in present-day Turkey. Assur, where Assur-idi himself lived, was a relatively small city perched on a cliff overlooking the river Tigris in the north of modern Iraq.

His letter said

Thus speaks Assur-idi; say to Assur-nada:

After you came here, you broke your promises five or six times!

Even though the weapons of the god Assur and the goddess Assuritum have fallen on you, you still break your word.

You say: “Let them care about the one who sets the words of the gods above those of mankind!”

So far you have not budged. Your children have been chased into destitution. You bother me with your own sorrow, while I suffer out of pity for the children.

The gods Assur and Assuritum are giving you urgent warnings. They say to me: “He speaks wickedness in his heart, his thoughts are not kind towards you, his hand is turned away.”

All those words which the gods spoke to you, words about our family – heaven forbid that you should have forgotten them!



1. The obverse of Assur-idi's letter in the Louvre, 7.4 cm tall; published by Julius Lewy in cuneiform copy in 1936. © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN / Thierry Ollivier.

The gods said to me: "He has refused to obey our commands!"

It is vital that you obey the commands of the gods! If you don't, you are lost.

At first my anger was great, as you well know. But I said to myself: "He has delayed until now, but he must have heard the words of the gods. He cannot have made you angry."¹

When he had finished his letter, he let the clay tablet lie for a few hours to dry in the sun; he then wrapped it carefully in a thin, gauze-like piece of textile and placed it in an envelope of clay; finally he rolled his seal over the surface to prevent anyone from tampering with or reading the text of the letter. Early the next morning he went to the city gate, where a number of donkey caravans were getting ready to leave, and he handed the letter to one of the donkey drivers, asking him to see it safely delivered. The letter was then shipped from Assur across the Syrian steppe, up through the passes of the high Taurus Mountains, and after a few weeks on the road it was finally handed over to Assur-nada in his house in the town called Kanesh, where he made his living as a merchant.

It is not very likely that he would have been happy to receive this letter, but whether he simply felt irritation and annoyance, or maybe experienced a pang of remorse, we do not know. Undoubtedly he would have written an answer to send back to Assur, and it may still lie there in the unexcavated ruins of his father's house, waiting to be found by a lucky archaeologist, if it still exists.



THE TABLET WITH ASSUR-IDI'S LETTER WAS FOUND AROUND 1900 AD BY people who dug into the ruins of Assur-nada's house in Kanesh in central Anatolia; it was sold on the antiquities market and eventually ended up in the Louvre in Paris together with hundreds of other tablets from the same city in Anatolia.

The first time I held Assur-idi's letter in my hand, one of many I had to get through that week, picking it up and beginning to read it, I felt as if the millennia fell away and a mysterious direct contact with Assur-idi became real in the dusty office overlooking the Seine. This old man who had long conversations with the gods and who was so unhappy and disappointed by his son, whom he even accused of outright blasphemy, seemed to be more than just a shadow on a sun-drenched grey wall; he was almost within reach. I felt I knew him and understood him, the cantankerous, sour old man. I cannot say now, knowing so much about him after years of study, that I would have liked the man if I had met him; nor do I think his son loved him very much, and maybe he appreciated the long distance between them.

We know quite a lot about these men, for this was not the only bitter and reproachful letter the father wrote to Assur-nada, reminding him of promises to gods and men and vigorously, in fact slightly hysterically, complaining about the wayward son's unacceptable behaviour. The old man lived in a

world of drama and fury. Another letter begins with the cry: "As if hit by the foot of the storm god Adad in full rush my house is devastated! But you, you are gone!"²

One of the complaints in the letter can be elucidated by other texts. The brief reference to Assur-nada's children, who are supposedly neglected by their father and are the source of their grandfather's pity, connects the text with another letter from the old man in which we hear more about these children. This text begins with a long passage about debts and investments, and then Assur-idi ends his letter as follows, almost as an afterthought:

I have raised your son, but he said to me: "You are not my father!"

He then got up and left.

Also your daughters I have raised, but they too said: "You are not our father!"

Three days later they got up and left in order to go to you, so let me know what you think.³

These cool words in fact hide a very serious situation, and Assur-nada in far-away Anatolia must have been extremely upset by this news. We can conclude that his children had been raised in Assur in the house of their grandfather, surely in order to get an education in the case of the son, and perhaps in the hope of good marriage prospects for the daughters. But apparently the old man, with his vehemence, had become too much for the children, who took a desperate decision to renounce him and try to find a way to go to their father in Anatolia.

We do not know how old the children were when they broke their ties to the grandfather, but they were clearly too young to stand on their own feet, and it is quite uncertain how they would have managed to scrape together the money to pay for the long trip to Anatolia. In fact, things seem to have gone badly wrong. We have a letter to Assur-nada sent from a friend of his in Assur, in which we read that the writer had been forced to take care of the children. Together with another man he had taken a loan at interest (200 percent per annum!) in order to feed the children, and not surprisingly they want the father to send an express messenger with money to pay back the loan and the accrued interest, plus some extra money so that his son and daughters will not starve.⁴ Clearly, the break with the grandfather was so absolute that there was no way he could be approached for help. It seems likely, though, that things must have calmed down. The son did move to Anatolia to work under his father, but that probably happened a few years later. We do not know what became of the girls.

Of the forty-three letters we have preserved from Assur-idi, only a handful express the religious fervour we find in the one quoted here, but even when he writes about mundane matters concerned with the running of the family's business, his tone is mostly accusatory. "Why is it that ...?" is a common preamble in his letters, always in an irritated or reproachful tone. In other respects his business letters are characteristic of the vast majority of the nearly ten thousand letters found at ancient Kanesh in Anatolia, letters which revolve endlessly around the problems of money, debt and profit. However, few other letter writers come across as such forceful characters as Assur-idi, so he holds a special place for me because of the immediacy of his religious letters. How should we deal with them, what can they tell us beyond what they reveal about a perhaps somewhat strange individual living four thousand years ago?

When I was introduced to the Old Assyrian texts some fifty years ago in Ankara, where I studied with Professor Kemal Balkan, we looked at one of the angry letters from Assur-idi. Being a rank beginner I could read the signs, find some words in the dictionaries, but I simply could not understand the text, so I asked Kemal Balkan for an explanation. He studied the text carefully, and when he had read it once he looked up at me and smiled. Then he returned to his reading, and when he was done the second time, he put down the book, shook his head and said with a sad smile: "This letter was written by a madman – or it could have been a woman."

This was not as bad as it sounds, for Kemal Bey was referring to the fact that the relatively rare letters written by women are often extremely difficult to understand. It is deeply interesting to see that where men write about business and only rarely touch upon matters of family affairs or emotional problems, those topics are characteristic of women's letters. Not only are they often written in such agitation that the grammar suffers, they are full of words which belong to a very special sphere of life, one that is rarely attested in the entire cuneiform tradition, and they are therefore often very hard to understand. What Kemal Balkan saw was that Assur-idi was one of the very few men in the correspondence who sometimes composed emotional letters similar to those written by women.



TRANSLATING AND EXPLAINING SUCH TEXTS IS NOT A SIMPLE TASK. WHEN HE was presenting a selection of cuneiform letters from all periods in the ancient Near East, the great Assyriologist A. Leo Oppenheim began by asking the necessary question "Can these bones live?" It is in fact not self-evident, for it is no uncomplicated matter to establish familiarity with

a language and culture of the past or to communicate this understanding to a modern reader.

A text like Assur-idi's letter can give us a sense of a simple, uncomplicated bond between us and the past when read in translation. My own experience with the Old Assyrian texts obviously informs the version in English, and it cannot be ruled out that other interpretations of details will seem possible, perhaps preferable, to another scholar. My rendering is as good as I can make it, and I am convinced that it offers a very reasonable portrait of a special moment in an old, long-dead man's life.

If we are to achieve any real insight into the minds of men and women of the past, we have to accept the possibility of locating them in a reconstructed social, physical and mental world that can be analysed and described. The great question is how we get from the holes in the ground and the lumps of clay to the society and the people of the distant past – a presumptuous journey, it would seem.

Working on Assyriological evidence is in some respects quite different from historical research in general, first of all because all of our evidence has been found as the result of archaeological excavations. Most historians work on texts, books and manuscripts which are found in archives and libraries, preserved and copied over centuries or even millennia, but Assyriologists have almost no evidence of that nature on which to build.⁵ This is, of course, a result of the sad fact that Mesopotamian civilisation can be said to be “dead” – as pointed out by Oppenheim. The lines of tradition linking our world to the ancient Near East are so tenuous as to be almost non-existent, and in certain respects – think of the Hebrew Bible – often directly misleading. The persistence of the sexagesimal system of counting, for instance, invented in ancient Mesopotamia and still alive in our world in fossilised form as the 360 degrees of the circle or the sixty seconds and minutes in our reckoning of time, does not provide us with a meaningful tool in our attempt to reconstruct the ancient world where these ideas originated.

Furthermore, the fact that our texts have been dug up in excavations has a number of consequences. On the immediately positive side, it means that as long as excavations are going on we can expect that our database will expand, that new archives will appear and eventually be published. We are accordingly not – as some scholars working in other areas of the ancient world are – faced with a closed textual archive, but can reckon with new discoveries being made continually, hopefully for many generations to come. On the other hand, the texts we find have not been filtered through a selection process, where works considered to have been of special value or interest were copied and recopied and kept in libraries, even after the civilisation

of Mesopotamia had withered away. The most exciting and important compositions may never be discovered, and instead we find ourselves faced with a random sample of mostly everyday practical texts of no literary, historical or philosophical importance. Instead of treatises on great questions of life and death, we have texts which reflect and regulate the daily experience of life in the ancient world.

Accordingly, it is essential that the texts be understood as archaeological artefacts, because only then can they be placed in meaningful contexts and interact with the other elements of material culture. Together, texts and objects represent the reality that once existed. This intimate relationship has not always been fully exploited, since the documents have been dealt with by philologists in isolation from the study of the archaeological contexts in which they were found. We should attempt not just to establish the exact find spots of the texts – and even this has not been done in all excavations in the Near East – it is a matter of making texts and material culture throw light on each other. For instance, the information that can be gleaned from the texts can help us to better understand the spatial arrangement of a settlement (who lived where) and the social relationships (such as how two brothers lived next door to each other). An integrated analysis of the total content of a house – texts, household implements, graves – can be realised and will show how texts and material culture can illuminate each other and be united in a richer and more complex understanding.

It may be hoped that the combination of archaeological and textual evidence will eventually enable us to offer a minutely detailed description of the physical world in which these people lived, but we are far from attaining such a goal. Compare our situation with that of the British historian Simon Schama, who in a book on Rembrandt presents the city of Amsterdam around 1600 AD “in five senses”: smell, sound, taste, touch and sight. He can walk us through the streets, describe the smells from the harbour and the sounds of the bells from the many churches. Such a presentation can rely not only on the still existing city, but also on a wealth of information from texts and images. Precise renderings of the clothes worn in the street and at home, of furniture in the rooms where people lived and the interior of churches are available to us in the form of hundreds or even thousands of paintings. Nothing similar is at hand for the student of the Old Assyrian world. Although the modern scholar can visit the ancient sites of Assur and Kanesh, even walk along the old streets and alleys that were once busy, noisy and smelly, we are only at the beginning of an effort to reconstruct the physical reality of the past.

The texts dug out of the ground at Kanesh (modern Kültepe) are generally practical documents which owe their existence to a concrete social act, a marriage contract, a debt note, a memo or a letter, and they can be made to yield information only on the basis of an analysis of their context. In this endeavour we are helped by the fact that the texts were part of the archives of families of merchants, and therefore reflect the many activities of a specific group of people. The same persons will appear time and time again in different situations – lending or borrowing, sending or receiving a letter and so on. There is a long tradition of studying such texts as contracts, debt notes and documents referring to family law as the basis for a taxonomic investigation, concentrating much interest on specific formulae and the like, and that is clearly part of the foundation on which further analysis must rest. Transactions and relationships were then as now typically formulated in very similar terms, which is, of course, the reason we can classify texts as contracts, judicial texts and other documents. However, in a situation where we have the archive of an individual or a family, we can go one step further and link the texts to individuals and their activities. That is the great opportunity offered by the archives from Kanesh – and the challenge.

To a certain extent the Old Assyrian archives can be compared to some of the commercial archives found from much later contexts, especially the archives from Renaissance Italy. However, we should not forget that these later periods are much better documented; not only do the cities still exist and the houses and palazzos still stand, we have a living heritage of a material world in which to locate the archives. And the facts that can be gathered from the public archives of a city like Florence or Venice provide a wealth of information that is not at all matched even by the 23,000 texts from Kanesh/Kültepe. In the archive of one Italian merchant, Francesco Datini, we have more than 120,000 letters, over 500 account books and ledgers, some 300 deeds of partnership, about 400 insurance policies and many thousands of other business documents – all discovered in sacks under the stairs of his still existing house in 1870, some 300 years after Datini's death.⁶ Compared with these riches the material from Kanesh may seem puny.

Our task and our results are therefore burdened by a degree of uncertainty and ignorance unknown to a historian of one of the great families of Renaissance Florence, to take an example. Where the overall understanding of this later society can rely on a multitude of evidence of all kinds, we have to establish a general model for an analysis of Old Assyrian society through a detailed reconstruction of the structures and procedures that are revealed in the practical documents from everyday life. We have no treatises on the

proper conduct of trade and commerce, and even the most fundamental features of social and economic life have to be rebuilt and placed in a reconstituted context on the basis of our understanding of letters, contracts, debt notes and memos. In a way we are like casual passers-by overhearing snippets of conversation.

In this endeavour, philology, history and archaeology unite. The exact technical meaning of words, even the simplest ones such as “buy”, “sell”, “lend”, “debt”, “taxes”, “donkey saddle” and “profit” must be carefully examined. Fundamental concepts in Old Assyrian may not have any counterpart in modern English, and our own often vaguely grasped central socio-economic ideas and features cannot without infinite care be transferred to the evidence from the past.

In the millennia-long tradition of Mesopotamian civilization, the texts from Kültepe in many respects stand out as unique, a rich and dense record of a commercial society during a brief span of time. Similar bodies of evidence, showing a comparable depth and richness, do not exist, a fact that tempts scholars to regard Old Assyrian society as truly unique, truly different from traditional Near Eastern societies. The absence of similar material from other sites of the same period in the region could easily lead us to the conclusion that the Old Assyrians had created a new and different kind of socio-economic system. In other words, it is tempting to isolate the evidence from Kültepe from its contemporary world, simply because we know so little about it, but it would be foolish to assume that because we do not have such evidence, it did not ever exist. It is essential that we accept the utterly fortuitous nature of the material we have and that we avoid the delicious trap of believing that the texts and the archaeology must offer us a coherent, typical and representative picture of the past. It is accordingly difficult to determine the degree of uniqueness of the Old Assyrian material on the basis of ancient evidence from the region. It may have been completely typical, or it could have exhibited features that set it apart. Comparative analyses are therefore difficult to establish, and it demands great care and caution to engage in such investigations that transcend the historical and geographical borders and attempt to introduce evidence from much later societies that engaged in similar commercial undertakings.

Another set of restrictions on our analyses are imposed by the fact that we do not have archives from the mother city Assur, where the old Assur-idi lived, which means that we have to reconstruct Old Assyrian society on the basis of the texts found in a commercial colony hundreds of kilometres away. An acute awareness of this giant hole in our evidence must necessarily inform our attempts to make sense of the material that we do have. We have

to realise that many, perhaps most of our assessments and conclusions must of necessity be preliminary.

The special nature of the Old Assyrian evidence allows us to establish a very detailed analysis, but at the same time it is complicated, sometimes impossible, to determine how Old Assyrian society was linked to the wider world with which it interacted. And yet our evidence becomes understandable only when we locate it in a wider framework of contacts, caravans and commercial operations that reached much further than the world we can reconstruct strictly on the basis of the evidence from Kültepe.



THIS BOOK IS ADDRESSED TO BOTH SCHOLARS AND INTERESTED NON-SPECIALISTS, to Assyriologists like myself, ancient historians, archaeologists and anyone interested in these fields. It attempts to present in a straightforward manner and with a minimum of technical jargon an up-to-date synthesis of our knowledge and current understanding of an ancient society that has left us an enormous amount of textual evidence, albeit in the form of documents of a special kind. The texts give us a surprisingly detailed and dense understanding of the first attested commercial society in world history. A similar picture cannot be drawn for any other society in antiquity, and we have to wait for the appearance of the texts from the Jewish community in Fustat, Old Cairo, from the tenth to the thirteenth century AD, and of course the rich documentation from the cities of the Italian Renaissance, before we encounter a comparably extensive documentation concerning long-distance trade.

It is not easy for the uninitiated, or even trained Assyriologists, to get a secure grasp of the details of the scholarly work carried out in this small field, where only a dozen specialists in the world write books and articles that are in general fiercely technical and often virtually impenetrable to an outsider. This is a function of the youth of the discipline, where so much has to be established from the bottom up and where new interpretations and translations have to be underpinned by elaborately constructed arguments. It also means that a synthetic treatment like the present book necessarily will have to offer discussions of sometimes poorly analysed or understood elements and that new interpretations of several features will have to be included.

The Old Assyrian evidence is concerned almost exclusively with the conduct of long-distance trade, which is embedded in a very specific social, political and cultural reality. The titles of the chapters in this book will give an impression of the degree to which this world can be reconstructed. Several questions central to our understanding of ancient Mesopotamian society and its relationship to the surrounding world, including social, commercial,

legal, religious and cultural aspects, are illuminated, as are the cultural interactions involving Assyrians and Anatolians. For most other periods such a detailed analysis is simply not possible.

So far Old Assyrian studies have had a major impact primarily on the discussion of long-distance trade, and the documentation does indeed have a profound importance for this topic. Trade has often been invoked as one of the central features of the development of complex societies, hierarchy, political and social inequality, urbanism and state formation. Imports of luxury items have helped elites mark themselves as special by way of conspicuous consumption and the distribution of largesse to allies and retainers. Even an agrarian society like the one that developed on the south Mesopotamian alluvial plain during the fourth millennium BC could not be entirely self-sustaining; it also had to rely on imports of basic commodities such as metals, stone and wood for the creation of implements used in agriculture, as well as for weapons and as building materials for ceremonial and public buildings, temples and eventually palaces. Elite burials such as the famous royal graves from Ur illustrate an extensive use of, for instance, gold and lapis lazuli, materials that had to be brought to Mesopotamia from very far away. In some instances, such commodities were acquired as a result of plunder and conquest, but as far back as the first urban explosion in southern Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium, along with the so-called Uruk expansion, we see institutionalised contacts with distant regions in a development that is normally understood to have its rationale in commercial considerations.

It is well established, therefore, that there was a lively exchange with the world around the alluvium, both across the Zagros Mountains to the Iranian plateau, along the major rivers to Syria, the Levant and Anatolia, and across the Persian Gulf to Bahrain, Oman and the Indus region. Little is known, however, about the way in which such trade was carried out and was organised, and this is precisely what the Old Assyrian evidence can tell us, or, to put it in a more cautious way, it can at the very least provide us with an example of how long-distance trade could function. I do not claim that there was only one way in which this happened, and as will be seen from the discussion in the coming chapters, major changes took place during the more than two centuries during which the Old Assyrian trade was in operation. Nevertheless, the basic principles that governed the Old Assyrian commercial system not only are well established, but have close parallels in other historical situations.

It is the contention behind this book that the basic framework for a proper analysis of the period, its history, its commercial structure and its social complexity is likely to endure, even when masses of new material become

accessible. We shall, of course, be in a position to add great depth to our analyses, and no doubt many interpretations will have to be modified. One of the intriguing possibilities is that the introduction of modern methods of analysis of the archaeological material will open new vistas: as we know from work done elsewhere, analysis of DNA and strontium from bones and teeth promises to give us a wealth of information concerning the life of the individuals whose bones have survived. We can hope to know about their place of birth and the travels they engaged in during their lifetimes. Taken together with new, detailed analyses of entire archives these methodologies hold out the promise that hitherto unknown aspects of history, of political and economic structure and of material culture will be introduced. In the far distance is the prospect of new information coming from Assur itself, when and if excavations become once more possible.

Despite the lack of several published, complete archives, the very nature of the Old Assyrian textual corpus leads us to concentrate on individuals and families. In contrast to the situation involved in the study of textual corpora that stem from bureaucratic contexts, whether from palaces or temples, it is possible to locate many individuals in both time and space in our material, and in many instances we can offer elaborate family reconstructions spanning up to five or even six generations. The density of the documentation offers a wonderful opportunity for a kind of micro-history that not only allows us access to the general structures of this society, but lets us follow individual actors in their various activities, exchanging letters with family and friends, conducting trade in the caravan circuit or pursuing complex lawsuits. A careful analysis of the dossiers relating to persons or events in some cases permits us to follow complex legal or commercial procedures in astonishing detail, even from one day to the next.

In this book I shall attempt to discuss many aspects of Old Assyrian society in the light of such case dossiers, presenting long and short extracts from the actual documents in order to give the reader a chance to experience the tone of voice and the character of the arguments as they have been committed to writing. I shall accordingly return to Assur-idi and his sons several times in the following chapters, and a number of other persons will reappear time and again. Two of these are the successful merchant Pushu-ken and his colleague and business partner Imdi-ilum; of special interest to me personally is a man called Shalim-Assur and his family, because the archive, consisting of about 1,200 texts left by him and his two sons in the ruins of the family's house in the lower town at Kanesh, has been entrusted to me for publication. These persons and their activities will structure much of my presentation. In the Appendix on families

the reader will find reconstructed family trees and a more detailed discussion of the main individuals who will appear several times in these pages.

The slowly developing understanding of Old Assyrian society has been achieved by way of close readings of our texts and the creation of a general model in which our readings make sense. There are still many aspects of this ancient world that have never been investigated in depth, and some of our cherished achievements will undoubtedly have to be modified. Yet it is fair to say that we have come so far that we can claim to be able to present a relatively coherent and detailed picture of the world of Assur-idi and his son Assur-nada, where their personal problems and cares can be located in the context of their daily lives as members of what is in fact the first attested commercial society in recorded history. This book takes its departure from the scholarly work that has gone on patiently during the past fifty years.

Part I

Beginnings



THE DISCOVERY

IN 1881 THE BRITISH SCHOLAR THEOPHILE PINCHES, WHO WORKED IN THE British Museum in London, published two small tablets, one from the British Museum and one from the Louvre, which were said to have come from Cappadocia, in central Asia Minor.¹ His interest was aroused both by their physical characteristics and by their supposed origin, but he could not really read them or even determine in which language they were written. At the time it was something of a surprise to find cuneiform texts in Asia Minor, for that region was supposed to be peripheral to the great civilisations in the Near East, especially the cities in Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, corresponding roughly to present-day Iraq.

Moreover, it became clear after a while that the texts were in some ways very unusual. They were thought to come from the region called Cappadocia in central Anatolia, a landscape famous for its strange underground cities and rock-cut buildings, many of them early churches. During the decades following Pinches's article, more of these clay tablets with cuneiform writing appeared on the antiquities market in Turkey, and they were first sold in the bazaar in Kayseri, at that time a sleepy provincial town in the middle of Anatolia. Kayseri, now a huge metropolis, lies in the shadow of the mighty extinct volcano Erciyes Dag, some 50 kilometres east of the classic Cappadocian region. It soon became clear that the tablets came from a village called Karahöyük (Black Hill), northeast of Kayseri, and this village was located close to a very large mound called Kültepe (Ash Mound). It was about 500 metres in diameter and 20 metres high, and it must have contained the ruins of an ancient city of considerable importance. This was evidently the place where the tablets originated, dug up by the local villagers (see Figure 2).

During the first decades of the twentieth century such tablets came in a steady stream from Karahöyük, and they were bought in large numbers by

Anatolia and the Old Assyrian Roads



Cartography by Ivan d'Hostingue and Gojko Barjamovic 2010

2. Map of the region touched by the Old Assyrian trade. Courtesy Gojko Barjamovic and Ivan d'Hostingue.

collectors and museums in Europe and the United States. A few expeditions were organised in the hope of finding the houses from which the tablets must have come, but the efforts by the would-be archaeologists who dug holes in the large mound were all in vain. Ernest Chantre dug in both 1893 and 1894, and his rather outlandish conclusion was that the tepe itself was in fact a volcanic crater and that the old town had been entirely destroyed.² Hugo Winckler returned to the site and dug for eight days in 1906; in his view the mound was so completely disturbed by violent activity of some sort that it was impossible to distinguish archaeological levels.³ No tablets were found by any of these treasure hunters, but the villagers continued to offer a large number for sale.

This situation was obviously somewhat embarrassing, not least when the number of tablets in the museums reached into the thousands. In 1925 a famous Czech philologist named Bedrich Hrozný decided that it was time to solve this riddle and find the spot from which the tablets came. On 21 June in that year he arrived at the site accompanied by an architect, pitched his tents in the fields east of the mound, hired workers in the village and began to dig on the mound.

Hrozný had already shown himself to be good at solving historical puzzles. According to his pupil Matouš, he combined great industry and a methodical mind inherited from his father with an agile spirit and vitality derived from his mother.⁴ His major achievement had been to show that the so-called Hittite language was a member of the Indo-European family of languages. Hittite was associated primarily with the huge ancient site of Boghazköy, ancient Hattusha, in northern central Anatolia. This was the ancient capital of the Hittite Empire, where large archives of texts written in the cuneiform script had been discovered by German archaeologists, who had been working there since 1906. Many of these texts were written in a language that could not be understood. The script itself was not a problem, for the cuneiform writing system had been deciphered in the middle of the nineteenth century, but the language was unknown and unrelated to the Assyrian and Babylonian represented on most cuneiform documents.

Hrozný showed that this language was Indo-European, related for instance to Greek, and the breakthrough was based first on his understanding of a phrase in a text, where one could read *watar-ma ekutteni*. He realised that this had to refer to the drinking of water: *watar* is almost ridiculously transparent for anyone who knows a little English, and the verb *eku* could be related to Latin *aqua*, “water”, so the phrase meant “he shall drink water.” This was obviously only the simple beginning of a long process of analysis, and Hrozný himself created the basis for this in a brief booklet in 1917, in

which he described the language and presented a sketch for a grammar. Since then the study of Hittite has grown to become an academic specialty, with departments in a number of leading universities in the world.

Hrozny's fame and scholarly brilliance were of little help to him in his first weeks of work at Kültepe, however. The mound he had to tackle was huge. A *tepe*, or *tell* in the Arab designation, is a common feature of the landscapes of the entire Near East outside Egypt, and *tepes* are particularly numerous on the plains of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers in modern Iraq. Here we find truly gigantic mounds, up to a couple of kilometres in diameter and 30 metres high, and they all hide the ruins of ancient settlements, small villages, towns and huge metropolises like Babylon and Nineveh. They are formed by the gradual accumulation over centuries and millennia of ruined houses, built usually of unbaked bricks; such houses have a limited lifespan, and when they are no longer functional, a new house will regularly be constructed on top, so that a complex pattern of archaeological strata results. Not all houses will be renewed at the same time in a settlement, obviously, and the complexity of the stratigraphy of such mounds sometimes drives even seasoned excavators to despair, faced with a truly difficult and intricate pattern of layers. As a philologist with little experience in excavation technique, I have often felt relief, when looking at such a mosaic of levels and layers, that I was not supposed to understand what was appearing in front of us in the trenches.

I assume that Hrozny must have felt a little of the same unease when he was faced with the task of interpreting the finds he made. However, he appears to have confronted the problems with an energetic enthusiasm that poorly matched his actual lack of archaeological experience. This was an amateurish exercise. Hrozny had a limited knowledge from a season at Tell Taannech in 1904 under the guidance of Professor Sellin, a Hebrew scholar at Vienna University, and he started in 1924 with soundings and excavations at a couple of sites in Syria and was given permission to work at Kültepe in 1925. With a large team of workers he ascended the mound, chose a spot in the centre and began to dig a very large hole, still visible as a dark shadow on the satellite images on Google Earth, even though it has since been filled in again.

It seemed self-evident that the tablets had to come from the mound, but Hrozny did not find any despite his energetic efforts, which resulted in the discovery and destruction of some large buildings. He has left a few photos of his work, and a brief preliminary report of the excavation was published in 1927.⁵ Just below the surface he ran into 2-metre-thick walls built of very large stone blocks, uncovering part of a large building, some 60 metres

square. We now know from later excavations here that this was part of a large palace, and we can see from the photographs that he uncovered walls, ceramics and other smaller finds – but no tablets. He dug down to a depth of about 8 metres, but it is difficult to make much sense of his results as presented in the sketchy report he published.

In his book presenting the results from the later Turkish excavations on the mound, Tahsin Özgüç cannot hide his unhappiness with the way Hrozny worked, because it meant that valuable evidence was totally destroyed. He thought stone foundations were walls and then removed both them and the mud brick walls sitting on top of them, he left disorderly and confused dumps and he neither recorded nor collected any of the small finds that were made. Believing that the large palace should be dated to the Hittite period and had been burnt down around 1200 BC, more than five hundred years too late, he thought that the Old Assyrian tablets had to come from lower levels, so he dug down in a futile search.⁶

The situation must have been truly frustrating for him, for every evening he could retire to his tent and consider whether he should buy some tablets from the same men who were helping him in the destruction of the buildings on the mound. We do not know for certain how he managed to solve the riddle, but he claims that his good knowledge of Turkish allowed him to eavesdrop on the conversations of his workmen and that two of his helpers from Kayseri finally revealed the secret to him. The great Assyriologist Benno Landsberger told me once that Hrozny simply managed to get the local cook so drunk that he ended up telling him where the villagers were digging up the tablets.

It turned out that they did not come from the mound at all, but were found in the very fields east of the mound where Hrozny had pitched his tents. He had literally been sitting on top of the houses from which the tablets came. The field that belonged to the heirs of a man called Hadji Mehmed was located about 175 metres east of the mound, and it was in fact a very low mound which was raised almost 2 metres above the plain. Although he had not understood the significance of it, there were signs of heavy activity, with several holes that had been dug by villagers both from Karahöyük and from other villages in the neighbourhood. Once the secret was out, stories of veritable battles fought between bands of robbers here could be told; it turned out that at one point the gendarmes had stepped in and prohibited further excavations – which had not prevented the head of the gendarmes in Kayseri from digging himself with the help of some of his men. All of this was now revealed to Hrozny, who must have felt dismayed at having wasted several weeks of fruitless work on the mound.

He obtained a permit to move his excavation to the fields east of the mound, and on 20 September he began digging at a location where he could see clear signs of previous activities. During a brief season until 21 November he uncovered several houses – it is not entirely clear how many – and he found groups of texts lying in heaps in several places. Also, in what is now known to have been part of an extensive lower town, Hrozný managed to dig his way through at least two distinct layers of occupation without noticing that he had done so, but he has left us a sketch showing the walls and providing information about where the main groups of texts were found. Including the many tablets he had bought from the villagers, he ended up with more than 1,000 tablets, 600 of which ended up in the archaeological museum in Istanbul, whereas the rest were taken to Prague. Nearly all of the texts found by Hrozný have now been published.⁷

So in the end his work was a great success, the riddle had been solved and interest in the site flagged, so there were no further archaeological activities there until 1948. Hrozný dedicated the rest of his life to the publication effort and put out the first volume of texts in 1952. He also returned to his old interest, engaging in attempts to decipher other mysterious, unreadable writing systems, such as the Indus script known from Mohenjodaro and Harappa in Pakistan and the Minoan script from Crete. His luck had run out, it seems, for although he claimed to have deciphered 125 characters and found a whole pantheon of proto-Indian deities in the brief inscriptions on seals from the Indus culture, his results have not stood the test of time. He died in 1952 after years of illness.

During the years between Hrozný's excavation and 1948, when new archaeological activities at the site were begun, the texts in museums and collections were published and studied by a small group of scholars. It became clear that all of the documents on clay tablets from Kültepe came from archives belonging to families of merchants; in fact, Hrozný had excavated a series of private houses. There was a large group of letters as well as texts of other types: verdicts, testimonies of witnesses, contracts, marriage documents, debt notes, bills of lading and so on. They all reflected the complex commercial and legal procedures that regulated the existence of the people who had lived in the houses there. The study of these texts became a highly specialised field, and, moreover, it became riddled with controversy because of widely divergent interpretations of the basis for the existence of this society, views that were often presented in rather categorical and objectionable form. Few scholars wished or dared to risk getting caught up in these learned fights.

The next act in the drama of Kültepe opened with the Nazi takeover in Germany in 1933, for that led to the expulsion of a whole generation of Jewish university scholars who were forced into exile. Some of them chose to accept an invitation from the Turkish government to move to Ankara, where a university was being started from scratch in the new capital of the young country. One of those who accepted the offer was the already mentioned Benno Landsberger, the leading scholar in the field of Assyriology, who had created a flourishing academic environment in Leipzig. Landsberger had been decorated as a soldier in the First World War, so he was not among the first group to be expelled by the Nazis, but he told me once how he had arrived one day in 1935 at his office to find his star pupil, Wolfram Freiherr von Soden, sitting at his desk and calmly informing him that he (Landsberger) no longer worked at the university. Von Soden was a brilliant philologist, who having concluded his “de-Nazification” process, became the leading German Assyriologist after the war.

Landsberger moved to Ankara, where together with other scholars like Hans Henrik von der Osten and Hans Gustav Güterbock he had the task of founding a new institute and educating a generation of young Turkish Assyriologists, Hittitologists and archaeologists in fields that were seen as vitally important by the new ruler of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal, who was later given the honorific name Atatürk. Landsberger carried out this assignment with enthusiasm and helped build a brand-new university in the classic German tradition.⁸ In 1948 both he and Güterbock had to leave their positions to make room for the young, local scholars they had educated, and both men ended up as professors at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. When I was affiliated with that institute in 1967–68, I came to know them both.

One of Landsberger’s pupils in Ankara was the archaeologist Tahsin Özgüç, a young firebrand who was inspired by the new Turkish national ideology formulated by Kemal Atatürk, the “father of the Turks”. This nationalism was to create the basis for the existence of the new country left after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. That empire had covered large parts of the Balkans, including Greece, as well as the entire Near East with countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, but it was now reduced to Asia Minor plus a foothold on the European continent around the metropolis Istanbul. Moreover, it was threatened by the plans formulated by the Western powers to carve up Asia Minor into zones under European control and not least by an invasion by Greek armed forces that were attempting to establish Greek control of all of western Asia Minor. This region had, of course, been settled by Greeks since

the classical period, as is evidenced by the numerous large ruins of ancient Greek cities, now popular tourist attractions. General Atatürk succeeded in expelling the Greek forces, stopping their advance towards central Anatolia in a famous battle near the river Sakarya, not more than 80 kilometres from Ankara. The Western powers recognised the new country in 1923 and gave up their claims to large chunks of Asia Minor. This left the new ruler and the Turkish elite facing a tremendous challenge: creating a new country from scratch. Central elements of the new nationalism were taken over from Western countries and combined with local Anatolian traditions.

One of the vital tasks was to create a sense of this new Turkey as a meaningful country, united in a common language, culture and history. And this was where the young Tahsin Özgüç felt that he had a truly important contribution to offer. He wanted to create a *national* archaeology, a discipline freed from the traditions of the large Greco-Roman ruin fields in western Asia Minor. He felt that the new Turkey could not base its understanding of its own past on that history. Instead, the focal point of a new history had to be the Hittite Empire, a large state with its centre in Anatolia which had been a major player in the ancient Near East in the period between ca. 1600 and 1200 BC. It had dominated all of Asia Minor and extended its control to large parts of modern Syria and Lebanon, and it had been an equal partner of such states as Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia. What made it the ideal starting point for a new Turkish history was the fact that it had been an Anatolian state and it had left numerous traces all over the region in the form of monuments, cities and rock reliefs. The Hittite Empire brought Anatolia into the full light of history, and the German excavations at the capital, Hattusha, had uncovered a large number of texts which showed that the Hittites had played a central role in the political life of the entire Near East. Not surprisingly, Atatürk himself took a lively interest in the various excavations that had been started and visited several of them in person. The aim of a new national archaeology in line with the legacy of Atatürk was expressed by Özgüç in 1982:

The reason for Atatürk's great interest in archaeology should not be explained by scientific considerations alone. It should be sought in his patriotic feelings as well. Actually, it would be impossible to separate archaeology in Turkey from Atatürk. According to Atatürk, to be the master of one's land requires full knowledge of it.... Since Atatürk, this clear goal has constituted the source for the study of ancient Anatolian civilizations.⁹

To fulfil this program it was logical to concentrate on the heritage of the Hittites. But here Özgüç was faced with a serious problem, for the immense

capital of the Hittites, Hattusha, modern Boghazköy, had been under excavation by German archaeologists for several decades, and there was no other obvious candidate as a significant Hittite city. Instead, he hit upon the rather daring idea of reopening the excavations at Kültepe, even though it was clear that there were no significant finds there from the period of the Hittite Empire. His aim was twofold. Firstly, he was sure that he would find in the local traditions of Kültepe the roots of Hittite culture; he was convinced, he once told me, that the inhabitants of that city had spoken an early form of Hittite and that it was here he would find the foundation for the later developments in Anatolia's history. Secondly, by uncovering more texts at Kültepe he would show that this region had been an active participant in the high civilization of the Near East, even before the time of the Hittite Empire. His main aim was to reveal the origin of the Hittite civilization.

Özgüç told me over dinner one evening in Ankara that his teacher Landsberger had been sceptical about these plans. He felt that Hrozný had probably found all the texts already, and there would accordingly be little profit to be gained from the site. Özgüç was tired of excavating Roman baths and cemeteries in Ankara, however, and he proceeded with his plans and was able to find the necessary support, which enabled him to begin excavations at Kültepe in 1948. Landsberger came to visit for a few days, but he was in fact already on his way to Chicago. Logically, Özgüç began in the lower town close to the still visible holes dug by Hrozný, and the results were spectacular. He found more than a thousand cuneiform tablets during this first season, and he managed to lay the foundation for a real understanding of the character and scope of the settlement there. The excavation showed that the lower town had existed during four main phases, labelled levels 4, 3, 2 and 1; the last was subdivided into a well-documented level 1b and a very poorly attested level 1a. In the two deepest levels, 4 and 3, no tablets were found; the richest finds came from the houses in level 2, and a very small number of texts were found in level 1b. This basic stratigraphy still stands (see Figure 3).

He continued working at Kültepe until his death in 2005, when he was eighty-nine years old, but during his long career he also led excavations at several other sites in Anatolia, and it seems reasonable to say that he managed largely to fulfil the promise he had made himself as a young man: to establish a meaningful national Turkish archaeological tradition. His wife Nimet, also an archaeologist, was part of the team at Kültepe for some years, but later she took over responsibility for some other large and important archaeological activities in Anatolia, first of all the huge tepe called Acemhöyük, south of the great Salt Lake, where she found another city which was contemporary



3. Kültepe from the air. The excavated area at upper right, the modern village at top. Kültepe Excavation Archives.

with the Old Assyrian levels at Kültepe. During Tahsin Bey's last years, the excavation at Kültepe was in effect run by his assistant and successor as professor of archaeology at Ankara University, Kutlu Emre, and she was still active every year as supervisor at the trenches, long after retiring from her post at the university. The new leader of the excavations is Professor Fikri Kulakoğlu.

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KANESH WAS NOT THE ONLY PLACE IN ANATOLIA WHERE FINDS FROM THE Old Assyrian period were made. Excavations at four other sites have revealed remains of settlements from the same period, but they have all been somewhat disappointing when it comes to textual discoveries.

As early as 1927–32, a team from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago conducted excavations at a site called Alishar, some 90 kilometres north of Kültepe. This site consists of an oval platform or lower city, 520 by 350 metres, and on that sits a high conical mound referred to as the citadel. Alishar was occupied from the Chalcolithic period onwards, and in trenches from the Middle Bronze Age in the lower town the excavators found houses

in which were small groups of tablets. Seventy tablets and fragments were recovered, and fifty-three of these could be read and were published by I. J. Gelb in 1935.¹⁰ He was able to conclude that the tablets from Alishar differed in so many respects from the bulk of the texts from Kültepe that they could not be contemporaneous. He dated the Alishar texts to a generation after the level 2 texts from Kültepe. The ancient name of Alishar appears to have been Amkuwa, a town also known from the Hittite period. It is now clear that nearly all the Old Assyrian texts discovered at this site are contemporary with the later phase at Kültepe, the period referred to as level 1b. Three groups of texts, found in situ in different houses, were small archives belonging to Assyrian merchants; one of them was a certain Nabi-Enlil, who in a letter mentioned a meeting with another Assyrian by the name of Daya in a town called Hattush.

“Hattush” is the Old Assyrian designation for the town that later became the Hittite capital at modern Boghazköy, Hattusha, and from here we have another group of texts, among them a small archive belonging to the very same Daya mentioned in the letter found at Alishar. So the texts here are also almost entirely from the later period.¹¹ A few houses were excavated in the area that must have been the original town, and so far seventy-one tablets have been published, and there is clearly scope for a much larger exposure of the Middle Bronze levels.

Both Amkuwa and Hattush are mentioned in texts from Kültepe from both periods (2 and 1b), so there must have been an Assyrian settlement there also during the period of level 2 at Kanesh. The two other sites where excavations have produced ruins contemporary with the lower town at Kültepe cannot with certainty be given their ancient names: Acemhöyük, a large mound south of the Salt Sea in central Anatolia has been excavated by Nimet Özgüç and Aliye Öztan. The commonly suggested identification of this site with ancient Purushaddum is not very likely, and it may instead have been known as Ulama. The dig here has exposed two palatial buildings, and in one of them was found a large hoard of bullae, many of them inscribed, but no tablets have been discovered.¹² There was clearly a lower town, but it is now entirely built up with modern houses, so there is no hope of finding the Assyrian settlement.

The very large mound Karahöyük Konya, situated now in a suburb of the modern town Konya, was excavated during several seasons by a team under the direction of Professor Sedat Alp of Ankara University. Again, no texts have been discovered on the mound, but a substantial collection of bullae and seals were found, and all the finds appear to belong to the later Old Assyrian phase, contemporary with level 1b at Kültepe.¹³

A Japanese expedition led by Professor Omura has been working for many years at the site called Kaman Kale not far from Kirshehir in central Anatolia. Old Assyrian period levels have been excavated there and a single tablet was found, unfortunately quite uninformative.

Scattered finds have been made in a few other places, and perhaps the most intriguing is a cylinder seal found by a local farmer on a mound called Ayvalpınar, not far from the modern town of Amasya on the northern edge of the central Anatolian plateau. No excavations have been carried out there.¹⁴

THE MOUND AT KÜLTEPE

TO REACH KÜLTEPE ONE LEAVES KAYSERI DRIVING NORTH-EAST IN THE direction of the next large town, called Sivas, about 175 kilometres away. One comes upon a small green region with fields and orchards, clearly a rich agricultural area, and about 20 kilometres from Kayseri's centre, shortly before the valley narrows and the road ascends a small ridge, there is a sign showing the road to "karum Kaniş", the common Turkish designation for the fields of ruins covering the lower town. Turning off to the left, one crosses some railway tracks and enters a small road that leads to the mound and the village. After a couple of kilometres the mound appears behind a line of trees on the left of the road, and a track leads to the lower town on the right. Until recently one had to wade ankle-deep in dust to get to the trenches, but after the Turkish and Austrian presidents visited the site a few years ago, the road from the highway was paved, and stone-covered paths, a fine parking lot and a wooden viewing platform were added to the site.

The plain, which is a continuation of the larger Kayseri plain, is about 15 kilometres long and barely 8 kilometres wide, and there are several small villages here. On all sides it is surrounded by low hills, and to the north, behind a ridge of small mountains, runs the great river Kızıl Irmak, "the Red River", which passes through all of central Anatolia in a great arc before emptying its waters into the Black Sea to the north. A smaller river, the Sarımsaklı, runs close by Kültepe before it loses itself in Kızıl Irmak close to Kayseri. According to recent geological surveys, this river ran directly below the mound in antiquity, and it must have been an important resource.¹

Kültepe itself forms an oval of between 450 and 550 metres and rises 20 metres above the surrounding plain. About one-third of its surface, the part closest to the village and all the edges, has been badly damaged by extensive digging that took place before the archaeologists arrived here, and it is

easy to see why the early excavators thought these destructive trenches were where the villagers found their tablets. In fact, this was where they collected earth to spread on their fields and gardens, for the soil in the mound is excellent fertilizer, and this practice continued until Özgüç reopened the excavation in 1948. It is unclear if any of the early tablets came from the mound, but Hrozny does mention that on the last day of his dig, one of the locals showed him a spot on the mound where he claimed tablets had first been found, but he had no time to pursue this and he does not indicate where the spot was.

The height of the mound alone tells us that it must have been inhabited for a very long time, but we have no clear knowledge of periods here before the Early Bronze Age I in the third millennium BC. The finds from the succeeding Middle Bronze Age are close to the surface, and they are overlaid only by scattered remains from the Late Hittite, Roman and Hellenistic periods, when a provincial town was located here. In the classical period it was known as Anisa, a name that surely contains an echo of Bronze Age Kanesh, but at that time it was eclipsed by Mazaka, the later Caesaria, now Kayseri, in the shadow of the volcano Erciyas Dag.

On the mound, Özgüç uncovered several official buildings dating from the Middle Bronze Age, ca. 2000–1600 BC, and he did not attempt to explore the earlier strata. The new excavator, Professor Fikri Kulakoğlu, has chosen to open a series of trenches in the south-eastern sector of the mound, where he has discovered very substantial buildings dating to the late third millennium, the Early Bronze Age. These efforts promise to give us quite new information about the history of the site.²

The most imposing ruins on the mound are from the large central palace, which measures about 110 by 100 metres.³ Part of this building had already been removed by Hrozny, and it is difficult to gain a clear impression of what it once looked like. What is now left is the northern sector of the palace, where the walls stand to a height of more than 2 metres. The bricks became vitrified during an enormous blaze that consumed the entire building, and they stand as bizarre sculptures, blocks of yellow slag, in which one sees the imprint of the large wooden pillars that had been embedded in the walls. This half-timber construction is obviously the reason for the extraordinary power of the conflagration.

The palace was surrounded by a substantial stone wall, between 2.5 and 4 metres thick. It had been plastered and the building must have been very striking sitting on top of the mound, dominating the landscape, visible from far away. Travellers reaching the edge of the surrounding low mountains, looking down on the green valley below, would have been struck by

this massive white building that spoke of power and wealth. Here lived a mighty king.

It is no longer possible to truly understand the architecture of this vast complex, although combining the sketchy plan made by Hrozný with the one established by Özgüç provides us with at least a general idea of the shape of the palace. There was apparently only one gate leading into the palace itself, although Hrozný may well have removed another one in the southern part of the building. The gate itself was flanked by two guardrooms, and in the gate was found the most important document that comes from the palace, a letter sent by King Anum-hirbe, ruler of a state called Mamma, to King Warshama of Kanesh. This gives us the name of at least one of the kings who resided here, and the palace is accordingly often referred to as “Warshama’s palace.”⁴

The enclosure wall could be traced almost all the way, but in certain places it had suffered badly because of later building activities. Towards the north, Özgüç excavated a large number of rooms which were built directly adjoining the outer wall. It seems clear when Hrozný’s plan of the walls he uncovered is combined with the plan established by Özgüç that the palace was constructed around a large rectangular courtyard, with rooms on all sides. However, significant rooms such as a throne room or private suites for the royal family are impossible to recognise. The excavator could not even establish where doorways had connected rooms. In several of the rooms Özgüç found storage vessels, some with their lids still in place and others with sealed clay bullae attached to their lids, indicating presumably who was responsible for the contents. No ovens or hearths were found, so it is unlikely that any of these rooms were used as living space. Isolated bullae and some tablet fragments were discovered in various rooms, showing first of all that the original archives had been scattered and destroyed. It is not known how many storeys the palace had or how they were built, but stairway rooms in the northern sector indicate that there was at least one upper floor, probably constructed of wood, and the rooms that are now visible may well have functioned as a kind of basement. The contemporary palaces found by Nimet Özgüç at the site Acemhöyük have the same character, but at least there the storerooms were still full of objects and bullae.⁵

A fairly large number of timbers with the bark preserved were found in the palace at Kanesh, and they have been used by dendrochronologists to offer a date for the building of the palace, and indeed for later repairs, and they tell us that the wood used in the first construction came from trees felled in the years 1835/32 BC; repairs were made in the years 1813/10, 1811/1808 and 1774/71.⁶

Underneath this massive building, Özgüç was able to follow poorly preserved remains of an earlier palace, which had been quite different in character. It too had been surrounded by a perimeter wall, but very little was to be seen. The most unusual aspect of this building complex is its shape: it was clearly a round structure, where rooms of various kinds had been arranged around a large circular courtyard. Not much of it could be excavated, but the present director, Fikri Kulakoğlu, has plans to open new trenches that will uncover a corner of the complex, so we may hope to get a clearer impression of this somewhat strange building. The two superimposed palaces represent the two main phases of the Old Assyrian period, levels 2 below and 1b on top, a terminology that has been defined on the basis of the stratigraphy and chronology established for the houses in the lower town. The date for the construction of the older, lower palace has been established by way of tree-ring chronology to 2027/24 BC, so it existed for almost two hundred years before being destroyed by fire and replaced by Warshama's palace (see Figure 4).

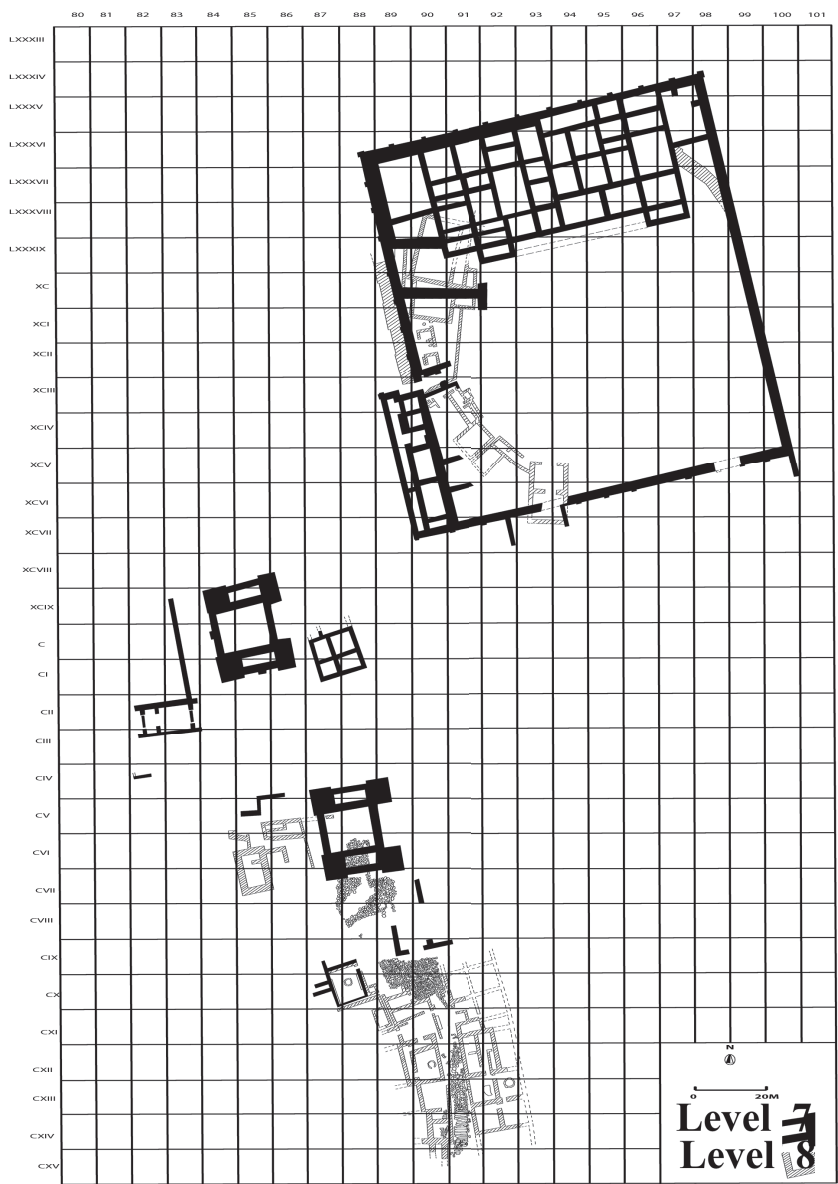
Very little is known about the kings who lived in these palaces. From the earlier period we have a single name, Labarsha, which appears in an offhand note in an Assyrian text. This is the only name for a king or queen known from the earlier period, in spite of the very large number of texts, and it seems clear that for the Assyrians the inhabitants of the huge palaces on the mound were distant figures who were referred to simply as "the king and the queen". Their names were irrelevant. The documents from the later, 1b phase contain much more information on this point, for we have a number of legal documents regulating affairs of the local Anatolian population, and these texts are said to have been certified by a named king, sometimes together with one of his highest officials, who was perhaps his crown prince. So the fact that we have relatively more texts written for the local population provides us with many more names. It is quite unclear whether such texts were written at all during the level 2 period.

The sequence and precise date of these rulers are uncertain, but a reasonable reconstruction has recently been offered.⁷

Hurmeli is the first known king from the period of level 1b; his name indicates that he came from the city Hurama, but whether this means that he was a usurper in Kanesh is quite uncertain. He may be assumed to have died around 1790.

Bahanu is known from two texts recently published. Nothing is known about him, but he probably had a short rule.⁸

Inar is known from the Warshama letter mentioned earlier as the father of that king. He conducted a war against a state called Harsamna. He may



4. The excavated buildings on the mound: the two superimposed palaces at top, the temples in the middle and the “customs building” at the bottom. Kültepe Excavation Archives.

have ruled ca. 1790–1775, which would make him a contemporary of Shamshi-Adad I in Assur.

Warshama is known primarily from the letter sent to him from Anum-hirbe, the king of Mamma. The latter ruler is mentioned in texts from Mari from the years 1770–1766; his rule in Kanesh may be placed ca. 1775–1750.

Pithana began as ruler of a city called Kushara, north-east of Kanesh, but he conquered the city and began an expansion towards the west. His reign was probably short, perhaps from 1750 to 1740.

Anitta, his son, has left us a long text in Hittite which tells the story of his reign and his conquests, primarily in the west. He destroyed Hattush ca. 1730, and he ruled in Kanesh ca. 1740–1725. He is thought to have built the two temples on the mound.

Zuzu is the last king known from Kanesh, and he ruled past the documented sequence of names in our lists of years.

The Anatolian rulers did not adopt the Mesopotamian practice of depositing building inscriptions when they dedicated a new palace or temple. The existing texts tell us extremely little about the life led by these kings, and the paucity of finds in the palaces and the uncertainties concerning their plan and the function of the individual rooms are, of course, deeply disappointing; we would expect, for instance, to find a throne room, a feature of almost all royal palaces in the ancient Near East, but that is unfortunately impossible to trace. Since both building levels were destroyed by fire and since it seems that there was only a relatively brief interval between the destruction of the old and the building of the new palace, we gain at least a hint of a violent and dramatic historical development. The conquest of Kanesh by Pithana did not lead to a destruction of buildings on the mound – or for that matter in the lower town.

These palaces were not the only monumental buildings discovered by Özgüç. Moving to the south-west on the mound, one encounters another excavated area, where Özgüç also worked and found large buildings. One of these is referred to by the excavator as “the large palace on the south terrace”, and it is indeed a considerable building complex of a highly unusual shape. On the other hand, it is only the monumental character of the ruins that leads us to call it a palace. Beginning at the city wall, surely in a spot where there was a gate at the time, a street leads into what appears to have been the ceremonial centre of the mound. Along this street, understood by Özgüç as a corridor inside a building, we have a series of rooms on both sides, in the report referred to as the east and west wings of a palace respectively. As far as I know this building (if it is to be understood as one whole) is unique in Anatolia.



5. The paved road or corridor from the “customs building”. One of the later temples can be seen in the background. Kültepe Excavation Archives.

The street (or corridor) was cleared along a stretch of nearly 50 metres. The first 13 metres were paved with large flat, wooden timbers, and it had been roofed with heavy beams, indicating the existence of a second floor over the street itself. The next 34 metres had a paving of large flat stones, but this section was not roofed. The street was about 6 metres wide and it led to a large open space, a piazza which was also paved with stone but where no contemporary structures have been discovered. This square was later partly covered with two exceptional buildings, presumably temples, and it is possible that in the early period before these constructions had been placed here, the wings on both sides of the street had continued towards the north for another 50 metres or so. If so, the building was truly immense (see Figure 5).

It seems clear that in both periods the entire area was closely related to the central palaces. In the first period the street led from a gate to a large open space; later, the building was abandoned and the plaza was taken over by the two temples. Unfortunately, the complete plan of the complex could not be established, and the outer limits of the houses on both sides of the street could not be determined, so all we have is the street and some of

the rooms facing it. They were generally large, and they contained great, well-built hearths which were designed for heating purposes rather than for cooking as in a private house. The contents of the rooms were dismally disappointing. Pottery sherds of various shapes constituted the bulk of the finds, but a few tablets and bullae with sealings were discovered as well. None of the texts have been published, but according to Özgüç they consisted of “letters, lists of payments for copper and silver, and matters concerning a verdict of the council of the Karum of Kaniš”.⁹ In some of the rooms on the east side, Özgüç found rows of pithoi filled with wheat and some large beakers.¹⁰

Granted that it is difficult to revise the interpretation offered by the excavator, it seems to me that the complex can be understood in a slightly different way. In my view, the entire construction should be seen as connected with a city gate, one that led directly into an area of official buildings, and a reasonable interpretation of the function of the house or houses here was that it (or they) served as a kind of customs building, where the caravans arriving from far away were checked and evaluated and where taxes were paid. If this is correct, this street must have been a very busy place, where royal officials received the caravans, argued with the Assyrian traders about the correct value of the shipments and calculated the taxes. The paved square at the end of the road could perhaps have been the site of the main market of Kanesh in the earlier phase, but that is, of course, entirely speculative.

The set of rooms along this street was contemporary with the lower, older one of the two central palaces, and it does not seem to have continued in use during the later phase, when Warshama's palace was occupied. Maybe the city gate was blocked, and the plaza at the end of the street was certainly partly demolished and new large buildings contemporary with the later central palace were constructed there.

These are two almost identical structures, roughly square with a massive stone tower in each corner and a central room of about 12 by 13 metres in extent. Without internal walls (of which there was no trace) or wooden pillars to hold up a ceiling, these rooms can hardly have been roofed. Both buildings were badly damaged by fire and by later activities in this area, but their plan is secure. Özgüç argued that they had to have been temples, mainly because they could not have served any other purpose, but no clear cultic furnishings were discovered there. In the best-preserved building, the excavators found a small, roughly cut lion statuette of rock crystal and a gold cup, both highly unusual objects which at least indicate that we are faced with buildings of a very special kind and purpose. A few tablets were found as well, all still unpublished, but it is known that one of them recorded the

sale of a slave. Özgüç noted that the two temples, if that is what they were, had no parallels in contemporary architecture from the Near East, but they do show a remarkable similarity with the much later Urartian temples from eastern Turkey, dated to the first millennium BC.¹¹

There are several references in the Old Assyrian texts to temples in Kanesh, and we hear in some instances that worshippers had to “go up” to these sanctuaries, which indicates that they were in fact located on the mound rather than in the lower town.¹² However, it is unlikely that the buildings discussed here were temples for Assyrian gods. Özgüç instead refers to a text concerning the already mentioned King Anitta in which we learn that he built two temples in the city. These buildings are accordingly often referred to as “Anitta’s temples”.

This ruler can in a much more direct way be associated with another severely damaged building in the same general area of the mound, a structure Özgüç referred to as the “official storage building”. It had two rooms and was 18 metres long and 7.5 metres wide. In the middle of the large room were two supports for wooden pillars that had held up the roof, and here was also found a bronze spearhead which carried a brief inscription in Akkadian: “Palace of Anitta, the king”. Apart from this significant object, the rooms were full of blocks of obsidian, estimated to have weighed in all some 3 tons, so it seems that this building was a kind of warehouse.

Although it is not easy to piece these various official buildings together to form a coherent whole, it seems that in the late phase we have a kind of temenos area in this part of the mound, presumably in direct relation to the central palace. Fragments of walls which may have surrounded this temple district were found, but they were only partially uncovered. Before that, in the early phase, a large official building that was presumably associated with a town gate existed here, and a large open square with a stone paving led towards the central palace. Even earlier, during the Early Bronze Age, massive official buildings were located here, perhaps a palace complex, as suggested by the excavator Kulakoğlu.

A very large part of the mound is inaccessible to ordered archaeology because of the destructive digging for fertilizer carried out by the local villagers. On the east side of the mound, a few trenches have uncovered buildings, and these have been described as private houses similar to the ones found in the lower town. No adequate description of these houses or their contents has ever been published, however, so it is difficult to evaluate the reports, but according to one account the houses here were “remarkably like their counterparts in the Karum”, and it was suggested that this eastern part of the mound was “an area of private habitation”.¹³

In view of the existence of a large lower town, one wonders whether there was really a private neighbourhood on the mound in the vicinity of the large palace. It would seem probable that only persons with a close relation to the palace administration had houses here. There is little help to be had from the finds made, for the scattered, unpublished and apparently mostly fragmentary texts found on the mound, forty in all, consist of business letters, according to Donbaz “in the format of caravan accounts”,¹⁴ which makes sense if they are associated with shipments being evaluated for taxation in the palaces; debt notes and lists of personnel in the palace administration; and a single text recording a verdict issued by the Kanesh colony.

THE LOWER TOWN

WHEREAS IT IS DIFFICULT TO GAIN A RELIABLE IMPRESSION OF WHAT the settlement on the mound once looked like and what buildings formed part of the whole, it does not demand a lot of imagination to envisage the bustling life in the streets and houses of the lower town, where more than a hundred buildings have been excavated. A visitor today can walk through the streets and narrow alleys and enter the houses along the way, and although the quarters excavated decades ago are badly eroded, one can still identify the walls and the streets. Unfortunately, after more than sixty years of excavation here no complete plan of the lower town has ever been published, and that makes it unreasonably difficult to gain an overall view of the settlement. Despite the large horizontal exposure (ca. 250 by 250 metres) we still do not know how large the lower town was, nor do we have anything like an adequate picture of such features as town planning, the relationship between the settlement on the mound and the lower town or the landscape in which the entire urban area was embedded. All these questions may receive meaningful answers when the new, dynamic excavator, Professor Kulakoğlu, returns to the lower town and starts a program of investigation that has been outlined in his most recent publication.¹

The excavators have determined that the lower town lived through a number of stages, reflected in a stratigraphy that incorporates four main levels, 4–1. The two lowest strata, 4 and 3, have not been uncovered over wide areas, and not much can be said with certainty about them, but it has repeatedly been stressed that both are present in all the excavated sectors. It is noted in an early report that the houses in these levels were built of “short-lived materials” and that they cannot be dated before 2000 BC, which means that in archaeological terms they belong to the Middle Bronze Age, as do in fact the other levels in the lower town. The buildings on the

mound show that there was an important political centre there also during the Early Bronze Age, but the lower town came into being somewhat later.

No tablets were found in the houses in the early levels 4 and 3, but it is at least possible that level 3 represented the beginning of the Assyrian presence here. In fact, the creation of the lower town, when the houses of level 4 were constructed on virgin soil, could well be understood as a reflection of the growing commercial importance of the city of Kanesh.

Level 2 contained the richest finds, especially of cuneiform tablets, and a large number of houses have been excavated from this period. Some 19,000 tablets have been found at Kültepe since 1948, when Tahsin Özgüç's excavations began, and the vast majority of those come from level 2. The ca. 4,000 tablets now in museums and collections around the world, those that were dug up by the villagers and the ones found by Hrozný, should be added to this figure, for with a few exceptions they too belong to the settlement of level 2. So at this moment more than 23,000 tablets have come from diggings and excavations at Kültepe,² and there is no particular reason to believe that the archives have been exhausted. A few hundred texts stem from the succeeding period, the one referred to as level 1b, whereas the last phase, that of level 1a, which appears to have followed directly upon the destruction by fire of the houses in level 1b, has yielded no tablets or recognisable house plans at all.

Establishing the stratigraphy and hence the chronology of the lower town was obviously one of the important first tasks for Özgüç and his team. Hrozný's plan of the houses he dug was confused, but it seemed clear that it represented more than one building level. It took a couple of years before a clear picture emerged, and some amount of disagreement among scholars was formulated as late as the 1950s, but the basic scheme is now generally accepted.³ It is also possible to correlate the stratigraphy in the lower town with the building levels discovered on the mound. The late, large palace referred to as Warshama's palace is contemporary with level 1b in the lower town, and the lower, round building complex is to be dated to the same phase as level 2. Since, as already indicated, the buildings on the mound were in general poorly preserved and had been looted and burnt to the ground, few finds from here can help us establish truly decisive chronological markers. This situation is further complicated by the fact that so very few of the texts from the mound have been made available in published form.

The lower town of level 2 consisted of well-built houses of mud brick on stone foundations. Wood was used extensively. Beams were often placed horizontally near floor level to serve as support for vertical wooden posts, and these in turn carried the rafters of the roof. The number of upright posts

indicates not only that they supported a roof, but that there was an upper floor whose weight could not have been carried by the relatively thin mud brick walls. It seems that most or all houses had an upper floor covering at least part of the house, although real staircase rooms are rare.

It is not known how long the individual houses were in use, but in most, the plastered walls had received three or four layers of whitewash, indicating a fairly long period of habitation. The houses in level 2 had been burnt in a fire, and it is usually assumed that this happened at one particular moment, when the entire settlement went up in flames, presumably as a result of warfare – and probably at the same time that the palaces on the mound were destroyed by fire.

Certain areas or districts in the lower town have been published and discussed as wholes, and we can see that houses of many different shapes and sizes were densely clustered in neighbourhoods, with streets running through them. It seems that the main streets led from the edge of the mound towards an outer boundary of the lower town, one that cannot really be determined as yet (see Figure 6). This pattern was then combined with a number of cross streets connecting the various neighbourhoods. In line with the normal pattern of town houses in the ancient Near East there were no windows opening to the street; the houses were turned inward towards a courtyard, and passers-by would have seen long rows of grey mud brick walls with closed doors, and only occasionally would they have come across a building that invited them in with an open doorway – a shop or a tavern.⁴

It has not been established how large the lower town was. In reports from the sixties and seventies there is mention of a substantial wall that seems to have encircled the entire settlement. This wall was first discovered in 1968 during the digging of irrigation canals east of the excavated areas, and it was determined to have been a double wall with interior partitions, constructed of large dressed blocks of stone. In 1980 and 1981 another part of the fortification system was discovered farther to the south, close to the dig house. Here Özgüç and his team found a stone building containing four rooms with walls standing to a height of 3.63 metres. This building, perhaps a tower of some kind, could be dated to the period of level 1b, whereas the first reports spoke of a wall that had existed in both periods. Other remains of what is presumably the same town wall have been found since then, usually during the digging or cleaning of canals. They are so far away from what we normally regard as the centre of the lower town that no proper excavations have been attempted there, but Özgüç has maintained several times that the lower town was very large indeed; in one case he says that it had “a diameter of at least 4 km”,⁵ and it is mentioned that a burnt level 2 house



6. Map of the lower town showing the excavated areas and the published houses. Grey houses contain archives belonging to Assyrians; horizontal stripes mark houses with archives belonging to Anatolians; vertical stripes mark houses without texts; dotted spaces mark houses with unknown archives; and white houses are those for which we have no information. Note that ca. 75 percent of the excavated areas have not been published. Courtesy Thomas Hertel.

was discovered some 500 metres south of the centre of the lower town. In another place he wrote, “The population of the entire town, which measures over 2 km. in diameter, may be estimated at 20–30,000.”⁶

However, proper geomagnetic surveys of the area of the lower town have not been systematically carried out, and the alluviation in the region means that the buildings from the Middle Bronze Age are buried so deeply (4–8 metres) that ordinary geophysical investigations do not find the ancient settlement. Professor Kulakoğlu has informed me that new investigations have shown that a river flowed close to the mound when the lower town existed,

and we shall undoubtedly gain a much clearer impression of the landscape around Kültepe in the coming years. All the excavations have been conducted in the area east of the mound, but it has been suggested that the lower town encircled the mound, which would explain Özgüç's startling estimate of 4 kilometres as the diameter of the settlement. Despite these uncertainties it is obvious that a very large part of the lower town, perhaps the greater one, remains to be excavated.

The excavations have been concentrated on what is assumed to have been the central part of the lower town, more precisely the area where most Assyrians lived and where accordingly archives were found in the ruins of the houses. It is generally assumed that those buildings where no tablets have been found were owned by local people, but that may well be an unwarranted assumption. Moreover, we do in fact have a few houses with archives that clearly belonged to Anatolians.

Even in the absence of a town plan, one can gain an impression of the nature of the settlement. In some instances we can literally walk from house to house, knowing who once lived here and what their names were, and sometimes we can describe at least the basic elements of their lives – all because of the archives of cuneiform tablets discovered in the archive rooms. Unfortunately, some 75–80 percent of the excavated area has never been published, we have no plans or description of the buildings and we cannot reconstruct the urban layout. Further, most of the archives found have not been studied, and it is in several instances impossible to say whether Assyrians or Anatolians lived in the houses in question. Hertel has analysed the available information, and the plans offered here are based on his work. He has defined and numbered 112 houses, of which 49 are known to have contained archives belonging to Assyrians; 13 are said to have belonged to Anatolians, but their archives (mostly very small or of unknown size) are unpublished; 17 appear to have contained no archives.⁷

Figure 7 shows a neighbourhood with several houses of different shapes and sizes grouped in building blocks surrounded by clearly defined streets. It seems obvious that many of the buildings had been added to wherever the owners found some available space, and building 20 on the corner in the bottom of the plan is one example. The extension here forced the street to make a sharp bend. This house belonged to one of the most important persons in the lower town, an Assyrian called Usur-sha-Ishtar, and his archive contained no fewer than 1,600 tablets and 400 texts in envelopes. Although these texts were found in 1962, they remain largely unpublished. Until his archive has been published, it will be difficult to get a clear impression of this man, but it is undoubtedly significant that he can be seen to have been



7. Block of houses around house 20, the building belonging to Usur-sha-Ishtar. Numbers in areas with square hatching (e.g., no. 24) indicate that an archive was found but the precise location of the relevant house is unknown. Courtesy Thomas Hertel.

closely associated with the king in Assur, who wrote letters to him and used him as his agent.

House 19 across a narrow alley contained more than 200 tablets, but they seem to have belonged to a variety of persons and do not really form an archive. These texts have been partially published by Professor Irfan Albayrak.⁸ House 25 across the large street belonged to an Assyrian called Dan-Assur and contained a modest archive of 165 texts, unpublished. Either the other houses in the plan contained no archives, or we have no reliable information about the number of documents found or the name of the owner of the house.

Usur-sha-Ishtar's house was originally a simple building with a great courtyard, partly paved with large stones, and a couple of rooms on the



8. Blocks of houses traversed by roads. House 55 belonged to Kuliya, 56 to Elamma, and 57, 58 and probably 59 belonged to Elamma's brother Ali-ahum and his son Assur-taklaku. House 90 at the bottom contained the large archive of the Shalim-Assur family. Courtesy Thomas Hertel.

ground floor. The huge archive had fallen from an upper room. In the vestibule with the entrance from the street there was a staircase to the upper floor, and under it and in the small storeroom next to it were a large number of pots of various sizes. A few tablets were found in the storeroom as well.

Figure 8 shows a larger section of the lower town with blocks of houses separated by streets. Ennam-Assur, the son of Shalim-ahum and the husband of Nuhshatum, lived in house 48 and probably also 50, both of them small and modest. In contrast, the very big house 51 was owned by an Anatolian called Shuppi-ahshu, who left a small archive of a handful of texts. The large house 55 belonged to Kuliya, whose archive has been published by Veenhof as AKT 5; it showed the owner's activities as an official envoy of the Kanesh

colony during the last years of the level 2 period. Across the street we find the large house 56 that was owned by Elamma, whose archive contained about 800 documents. This was a wealthy merchant family whose life can be followed through two generations. The rather unclearly defined buildings south of the crossroads, houses 57, 58 and 59, belonged to Elamma's brother Ali-ahum and his family, especially the son Assur-taklaku.

House 90 at the bottom, excavated in 1994, has a special significance for me, since this was where a large archive of between 1,100 and 1,200 cuneiform tablets was discovered, an archive I have been studying for more than a decade. These texts reflect the lives and activities of three generations of Assyrian merchants who lived in this house. The most important member of this branch of the large family was called Shalim-Assur, and his life as well as the activities of his sons and brothers will be discussed in detail in this book.

The house is about 100 square metres. It had two entrances from the street, where a line of large stone blocks formed a kind of pavement along the front of the building. From a long entrance hall paved with large stones, perhaps because animals were kept here, one entered a row of rooms which clearly were meant for storage purposes. In the two smallest rooms the archive was discovered, fallen from wooden shelves on which the tablets had been stored in boxes or baskets. From a corridor one gained entrance to the courtyard with a hearth. The other part of the house consisted of three rooms which had access to the street. It looks very much like a shop: the back room would have been the storeroom where textiles and perhaps elaborate pottery would have been kept to be brought out when a customer had entered from the street.

This was the home of one of the rich and influential Assyrian families in Kanesh. The rooms on the upper floor were for the use of the family members, whereas slaves and slave girls presumably stayed down below. One assumes that during the hot summer everybody spent the night on the roof (see Figure 9).

Almost all houses (though not the one belonging to the Shalim-Assur family) had a large oven, a smaller roasting hearth and a very characteristic horseshoe-shaped hearth used for cooking. The heating of the cooking pots appears to have been achieved with large stones fired in the roasting oven. Özgüç mostly refers to the large areas where these installations are found as "rooms", but it seems likely that they were in fact partially covered courtyards, even though the Anatolian winter would have created pretty harsh conditions for open-air cooking (see Figure 10).

Newly excavated houses often give you the impression that they were left in haste the day before. In the storerooms there are still rows of large pots which must have contained oil, beer, wine or grain, and a few years ago



9. Reconstruction of houses in the lower town made by the first architect, Akok. Kültepe Excavation Archives.

I saw two pots in situ underneath a bench on which sat two grinding stones. A couple of servant maids had been bending over these stones, grinding grain to flour which fell directly into the two pots. You felt they had left just before you arrived (Figure 11).

The Shalim-Assur family had a special relationship with a village called Tumliya, from which they bought large quantities of grain. It is highly unusual to hear about contacts with the countryside around Kanesh, and details about the provision of food to the town are simply not known. At least twenty-nine villages are known by name, but how many of these were located in the Kanesh valley is not clear.⁹

Underneath the floors of the houses were a number of graves, where at least the main members of the family had been buried. In some of these burials were found elaborate grave goods in the form of fine pottery and jewellery. This practice was normal in Mesopotamia, and in Assur many of the houses from later periods had large, carefully constructed crypts which were used by several generations of the families living in the house.



10. Street in front of Shalim-Assur's house with the current excavator, Professor Fikri Kulakoğlu. Photo MTL.



11. The grinding girls left a moment ago ... Photo MTL.

Such a grave was in fact discovered underneath the floor of the courtyard in the house of the Shalim-Assur family, excavated in 2004 when Kulakoğlu was not involved in the Kültepe expedition. It seems very likely that this was the grave of the oldest son, Ennam-Assur, and since the burial seems to have been unrecorded and the bones reburied, a unique opportunity for a scientific study of the remains of a well-known individual was lost. Modern techniques allow a number of important conclusions to be drawn from the study of human bones, and the results from such investigations may be seen in relation to the archives found in these houses. We are able to reconstruct elaborate family trees, so the skeletons discovered by the excavators on the basis of these family histories become, in some cases at least, human beings about whom we know very much. Not only family relations but detailed information on the lives and wanderings of individuals could have been available to us if the bones had been preserved, available for study in the light of the recent scientific methods of analysis.

The father of this family, Shalim-Assur, died in the north Anatolian town called Durhumit, and texts concerned with that event refer to expenses paid not only for the ceremonies in connection with his burial (the “wailing”), but also for the construction of what is called “a house” erected in front of his grave. This appears to point to the existence of a kind of chapel or monument, but such installations are unknown. Associated with certain graves at Kültepe, a stela of about half a metre has been found, perhaps erected to mark the grave.

The practice of burying one’s ancestors under the floor of the house in which the family lived points to a very close bond that was felt to exist between the dead and the living, and the ancestors were seen as providing protection for the family. From later texts we know that offerings were given to the dead in elaborate rituals at certain times of the year.

Some of the streets running through the lower town ended in small plazas, and according to Özgüç we find around them buildings of a different kind, smaller, one-room houses which he thinks functioned as shops and cook houses. These small squares undoubtedly served as meeting places where one could sit in the shade of a tree and enjoy an animated conversation over a pot of beer.

Certain streets were wide enough for a wagon to pass through, others were narrow alleyways; some were paved with large stones and had stone-lined drains running underneath the pavement, others were dirt roads; in some cases – like the street running along the house belonging to the Shalim-Assur family – there was a line of large stones along the wall, a kind of pavement that allowed guests to keep their feet dry. A general plan of the

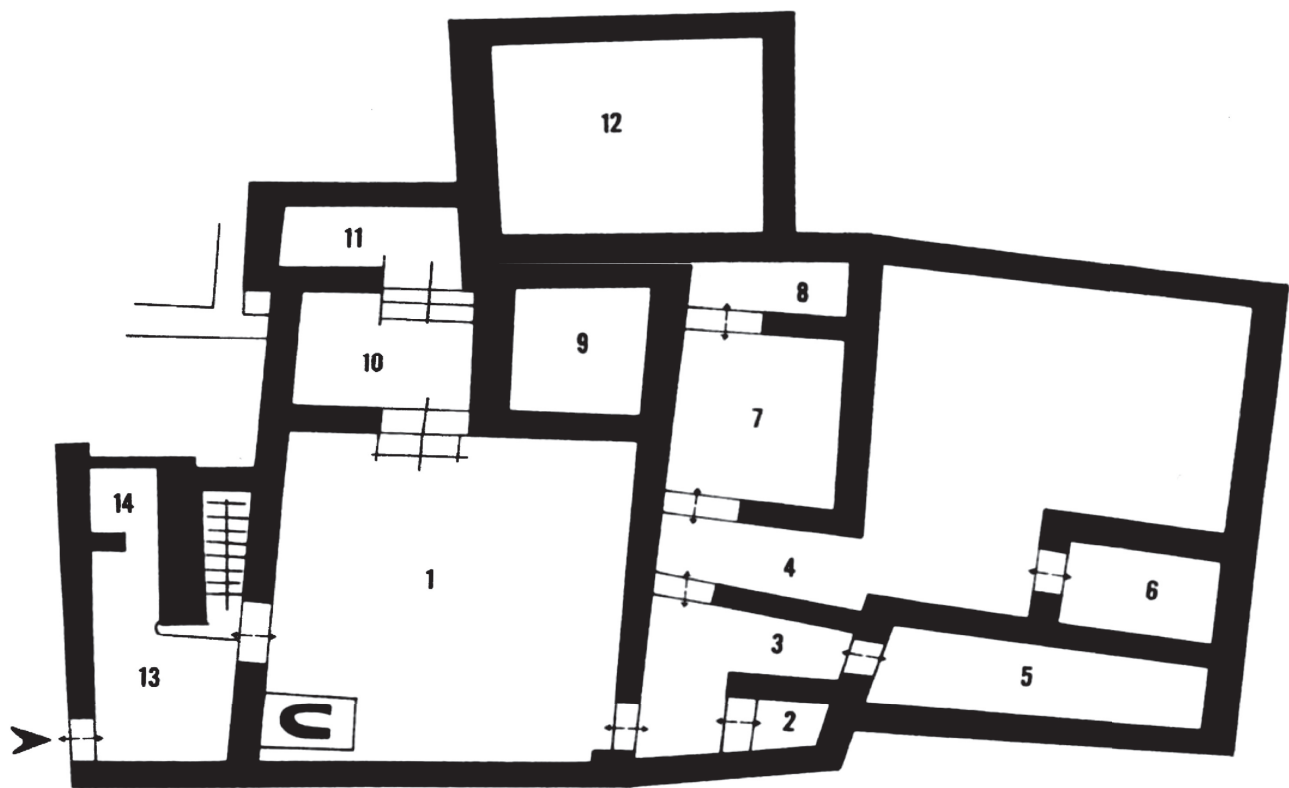
entire excavated area would allow us to form an idea of the pattern of traffic and movement through the settlement.

It has been stressed by the excavators that there is no difference in architecture or in the material culture between houses inhabited by Assyrians and occupied by local people – pots and pans, ovens and hearths are the same in all houses. The differences are marked entirely by the presence or absence of archives of cuneiform tablets. However, it may be significant that at least some of the local people who had houses here lived in buildings that were extraordinarily large and contained many more rooms than normal houses. One such example is the house belonging to a man called Peruwa, house 102 on Hertel's general plan (see for details Figure 12).

The house is more than twice the size of the house of the Shalim-Assur family, measuring 224 square metres, and it contains fourteen rooms. The wing with rooms 2–8 is probably a later addition to the house, and rooms 9 and 12 are cellar rooms, making use of the remains of an older building from level 3. Their floors are 2 metres below the rest of the house. One assumes that there were wooden floors covering these cellars. The staircase in room 13 indicates that at least part of the house had an upper floor, so the entire house was very large indeed.

Assyrians and Anatolians lived next door to each other, and although there were surely clearly defined differences between them in dress, hairstyle and language, they were part of a shared community. The streets would have been crowded with carts, donkeys, dogs and pigs, and the air would have been filled with sounds and heavy with smells; slaves and servants would have rushed through the alleys on errands for their masters; and men and women would have met, exchanging greetings and engaging in conversations. Anatolian grandees generally had larger houses than their Assyrian neighbours, displaying their wealth and power in the community, but many of the inhabitants here must have known each other well. Men like Peruwa would have had friendly relations with many of the more important merchants with whom they had business of personal interest. We read occasionally how they shared a pot of beer or wine, probably telling each other tall tales of recent travels. How did they communicate with each other? In this international community everybody presumably had a basic knowledge of Assyrian, and professional interpreters are hardly ever mentioned.

So far only private houses have been found in the lower town, and we miss the official administrative buildings and the temple or temples. It has been suggested by Dercksen that the temple to the god Assur and the very important “Gate of the God”, where oaths were taken and witnessed documents certified, should be looked for in the immediate vicinity of the fortifications



12. The house belonging to the Anatolian royal official Peruwa. On the large plan of the lower town it is house 102. The irregular shape and the incorporation of rooms from a level 3 house as cellars (9 and 12) indicates that the building had been enlarged and changed. Kültepe Excavation Archives.



13. The excavator Tahsin Özgüç and the author studying an unpublished plan of the lower town. Photo MTL.

around the lower town.¹⁰ These buildings may have been close to or directly connected with the main gate leading into the lower town and therefore quite far from the excavated areas. From the very start of the excavations, it has been an unfulfilled dream to discover the main administrative bureau, the *bēt kārīm*, or “the Office of the Colony”, for this is clearly where we would hope to find information concerning the political and bureaucratic structures of the Assyrian community. There are hundreds of references to this office in the available texts, but no information about where to find it. We know a great deal about what went on here, but we sorely lack the official archive that would have been kept in this place.

Even Hrozný was aware of the importance of finding this building, but he felt that it may have been located on the mound close to the local palaces and administrative offices. He pointed out that some of the really unusual texts containing the constitution of the Assyrian colony, texts that would logically belong to an official archive, had been found at the very start of

the villagers' activities, and they may well have come from the destructive digging which ruined such a large part of the mound itself. If this is true, then we shall probably never find the Office of the Colony. At any rate, it is somewhat churlish to complain when faced with the truly stupendous wealth of evidence that Kültepe has already provided.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXTS

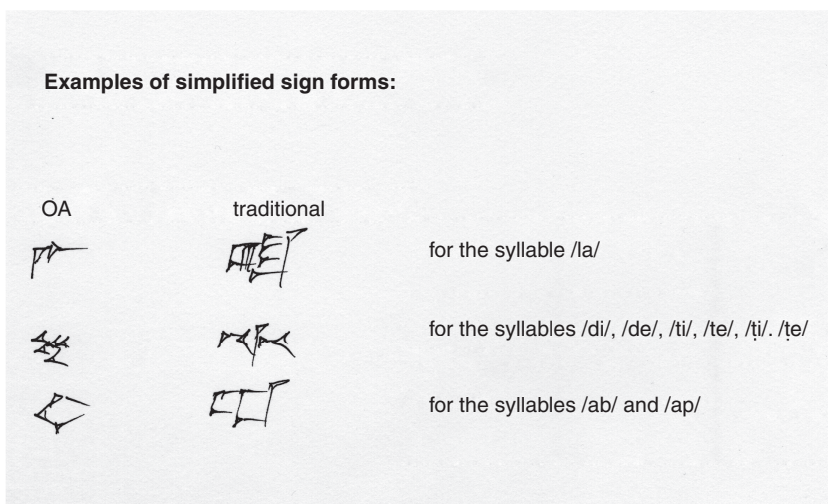
THE PRESENCE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF CLAY TABLETS WITH CUNEIFORM writing in the middle of Anatolia was something of a mystery when the first texts came on the antiquities market in the late nineteenth century. They showed that the cuneiform tradition was active there, but both the script itself and the language of the texts created difficulties. Even though it was not clear that the texts were written in Assyrian, it was obvious that they showed a peculiar relationship with Assyria, so it was concluded that there was a large population of Assyrians in Anatolia, or at least that they had a deep impact on the region, very far indeed from the land called Assyria and its capital Assur. This obviously demanded an explanation. First, scholars had to establish a consensus concerning the texts themselves: In what language were they written, and what did they say?

The texts were not easy to read. There were possible connections with the Assyrian language, which was well known from thousands of documents found in the large Neo-Assyrian palaces that dated to the first millennium BC, but the texts from Kültepe were clearly very different. The British scholar Theophile Pinches had concluded in 1881 that the language was “evidently not Assyrian”. Ten years later the first publication to present a sizeable number of texts was a booklet with twenty-four texts from the collection of W. Golénischeff of St. Petersburg. The texts themselves gave the first real impression of what these so-called Cappadocian texts were like,¹ and Golénischeff’s introduction offered long lists of signs he could identify, of personal names in the texts and of words which could reasonably be interpreted as Assyrian. Among the personal names were some that included the name of the Assyrian national god, Assur. However, so much in the texts remained unclear that he felt obliged to speak merely of a strong Assyrian influence on the language of these texts, and he felt it was quite premature to offer even tentative translations.

Given that the cuneiform system of writing was quite well known and that the Assyrian language of the late texts could be read with relative ease, it may appear strange that these texts from Kültepe should present such difficulties. However, one should keep in mind that a millennium of linguistic development had taken place between the Old Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian texts. Just consider that even such well-known texts as Shakespeare's plays in their original form present great challenges to a modern English-speaking person – and that is a gap of only about four hundred years. In fact, a more apt comparison would be with the early epic known as *Beowulf*, which was composed before the year 1000 AD. Although it is written in an early form of English, only specialists can read such a text in its original version.

But there were other hindrances, for the script in these “Cappadocian” texts did not behave as it usually did. Cuneiform writing already had a long history when the Old Assyrians began to write their texts. It had been invented before the year 3000 in the cities of southernmost Mesopotamia, the region close to the Persian Gulf, and it was first used to render the Sumerian language, a tongue that was not related to any other known language. It started out as a logographic script where each sign stood for a whole word – the way Chinese writing works – but it soon developed with the introduction of syllabic signs on the basis of the rebus principle. A certain sign shaped like a star stood for the concept “heaven”, and that was pronounced AN in Sumerian; this sign could therefore also be used for the syllable /an/ in all kinds of contexts. In this way a very extensive repertoire of sign values had been built up during the centuries, and when this system was taken over to write the totally different Akkadian language, the syllabic principle became the basis for the writing of texts, even though the logographs were retained to write certain words.

Cuneiform writing was a complex system, in other words, and traditionally it was necessary to acquire a scribal education in order to read and write. Professional scribes created and organised the elaborate administrative practices of the great organisations, temples and palaces, and even private persons were required to make use of their services, for instance when they wanted to send a letter. It is usually assumed that less than 1 percent of the population in ancient societies such as Mesopotamia or Egypt was literate. According to UNESCO the country Mali in West Africa, with a literacy rate of 26.2 percent, was the lowest-ranked country in the world in 2011. That corresponds roughly to the situation of black men in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, but in the ancient world we usually reckon with much lower figures. However, the Old Assyrians present a different picture, for it seems that despite the complexity of the cuneiform system, literacy



14. Old Assyrian sign forms that show the typical simplification, using fewer wedges and preferring identical elements.

was widespread and that most adult men, and some women, could both read and write, at least among those who were active in trade in Anatolia.

One of the reasons this became possible was that the script itself was quite drastically simplified. It has become clear that the Old Assyrians introduced three such simplifications: Firstly, they chose not to distinguish between voiced and unvoiced sounds, using the same sign for /du/ and /tu/, /su/ and /zu/, /ga/ and /ka/, /ba/ and /pa/. Secondly, they also chose not to indicate length, either in consonants or in vowels; a word such as *ukallimanni* would be written *ú-ga-li-ma-ni*. And finally, they deliberately chose signs that were easy to write, that is, signs which contained as few individual wedges as possible; since the act of writing involved pressing a stylus into the soft clay, it was also preferable and faster to use signs where similar elements (horizontal or vertical lines or oblique imprints) formed an entire sign, avoiding the necessity to turn and twist the stylus more than necessary (Figure 14).

One of the characteristic complexities of the cuneiform script is the wealth of different signs that have the same (or approximately the same) phonetic value, a feature that can be traced back to the original inventors of the script, the Sumerians in southern Iraq. Over time conventions developed regarding which signs to use when a certain syllable was to be rendered, but the Old Assyrians did not follow traditions. The guiding principle was to use sign forms that were as simple as possible and consequently easy to write. We can follow this tendency in the very earliest texts we have, where the new sign forms are slowly taking over.³ Understandably this caused a great deal of

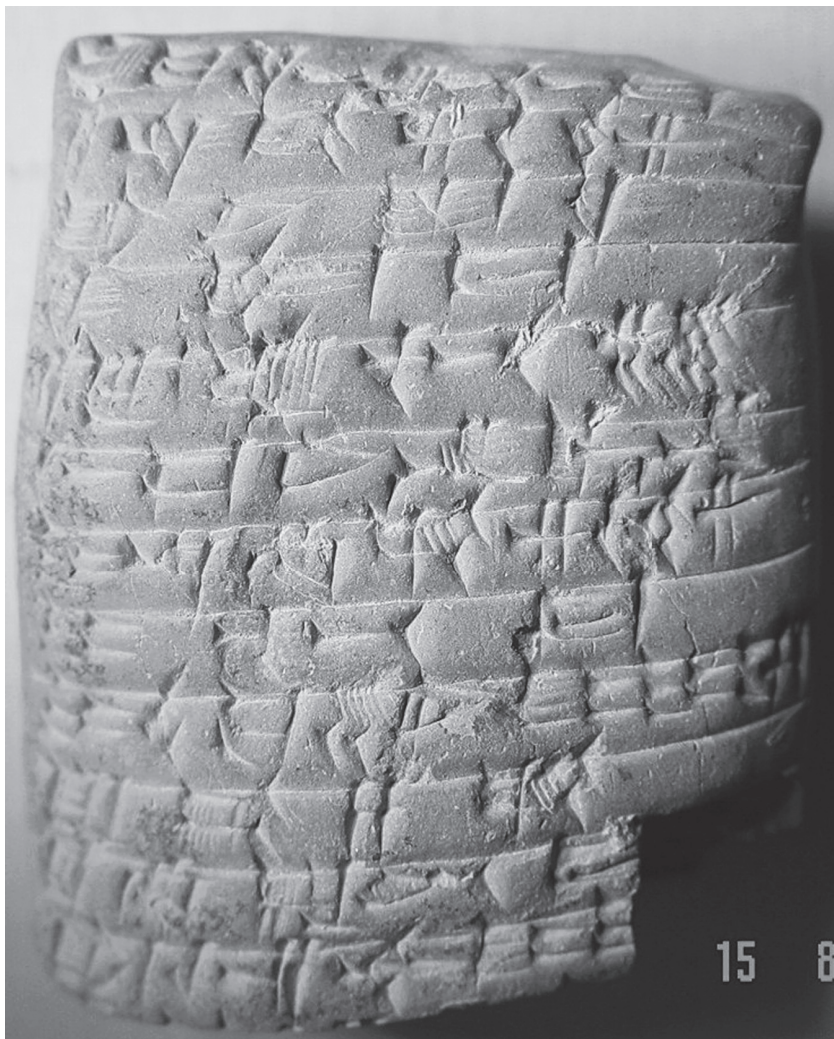
confusion for the early researchers. In effect, the Old Assyrian writers made use of a reinvented, simplified version of the classic cuneiform script that had been inherited from the late third millennium BC. These innovations introduced a degree of uncertainty, which means that even today, when the Old Assyrian texts can be read with some ease, there are many pitfalls for the interpreter, difficulties caused by the script. For native speakers of Assyrian the ambiguities introduced by the simplification of the script were not really a problem, but it is easy to see that they could create a great deal of confusion for the first scholars trying to make sense of the texts.

There was a very good reason for the Old Assyrian changes to the otherwise rather complex cuneiform system of writing. In this society of travelling merchants it was essential that the men and women taking part in the commercial activities had a certain mastery of the script. They had to be able to read a letter when they were far away in a village where there was no professional scribe, or they would find themselves in a situation where a letter contained confidential information which should not be broadcast to or even seen by outsiders. They also had to be able to write, compose a debt note or a quittance, sending information to others and drawing up accounts and so on.³ As an extra aid to inexperienced readers, the Old Assyrian merchants had therefore introduced a special word divider, a kind of punctuation which is absent from most of the cuneiform tradition. Its use made it much easier to scan a text quickly, knowing where one word ended and another began. Just like the merchants of the Renaissance, the Old Assyrian merchants to a large extent based their livelihood on their ability to participate in an elaborate system of communication. By simplifying the script, the Old Assyrians in a sense democratised writing, making it available to all reasonably intelligent people (Figure 15).

And they loved to write! The so far 23,000 cuneiform tablets excavated in the houses at Kültepe bear witness to the eagerness with which writing was incorporated into the daily lives of everyday people. We can also see that there were many levels of competence in the application of the system. Working with large numbers of tablets, one quickly sees how wide the gap is between texts written by accomplished writers and those laboriously composed by men or women who had only a limited experience. Some texts stand out as calligraphic masterpieces, whereas others are so primitive and poorly executed that one feels reluctant even to pick them up (Figure 16).

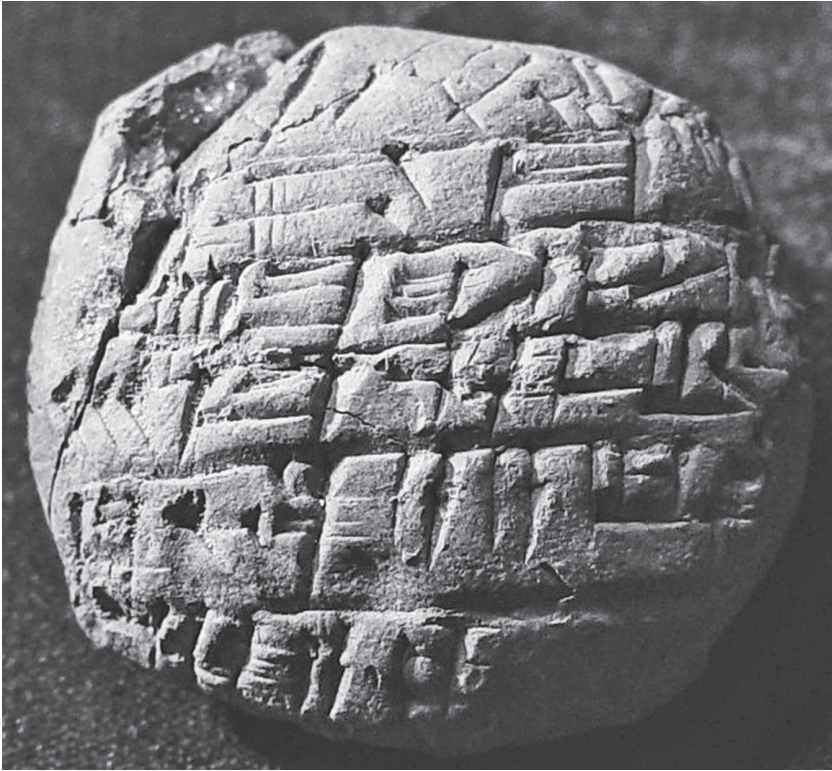
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WHEN THE FRENCH SCHOLAR GEORGES CONTENAU IN 1919 PUBLISHED THIRTY more tablets from his own collection,⁴ it meant that about a hundred texts of the so-called Cappadocian type had been made available, although half



15. *Waklum* letter from the royal chancery. The individual signs are unusually elaborate, with many wedges, and the text uses traditional signs such as BÍ in the word *qí-bí-ma* in line 4 and TI for /di/ in line 5. Photo MTL.

of them were so poorly preserved that they could not really contribute anything. At this time a small group of scholars had been busy trying to make sense of the texts, and it is fascinating to follow the rapid progress in understanding. Building on these previous efforts Contenau could say without hesitation that the language was Assyrian, that the texts should be dated roughly to the period of the Ur III dynasty in southern Mesopotamia, that



16. Poorly written letter with cramped writing and crude signs. Photo MTL.

is, around 2000 BC, and the script was no longer impenetrable, although it demanded immense care and continued to give rise to misunderstandings.

Contenau could even offer transliterations – that is, rendering the texts sign by sign in the Latin alphabet – and some tentative translations of parts of the texts. He also added a vocabulary and a list of signs, indicating the vastly improved understanding reached since Pinches's first effort in 1881.

Three years after Contenau's edition came the first of a series of articles written by Julius Lewy, a scholar who was to dominate the field of Old Assyrian studies during the following decades. He was now in a position to give an adequate description of the Assyrian language and could even present convincing translations of a series of texts.⁵

The ground was now laid for an analysis of the texts themselves and the society they reflected, and in this endeavour Lewy came to play a prominent role. He was a large, impressive-looking man and an unusually learned and erudite scholar. His contributions to the developing understanding of the

Old Assyrian corpus are tied to a series of text publications; he published the texts in the museum at Constantinople, in three volumes he presented the texts in the Louvre and in a number of smaller publications he offered copies, transliterations and translations of texts in private collections. Of particular importance was his magnificent edition of all the legal documents known to him in the early 1930s.⁶ He also advanced the understanding of several aspects of the Old Assyrian trade and society in a series of learned articles. Unhappily, in other ways his work was to have a deleterious effect on progress in the field, and the scholarly conflict which developed between him and Benno Landsberger, mentioned earlier, created a hostile climate which appears to have dissuaded otherwise interested colleagues from pursuing Old Assyrian topics. Lewy quickly built up a phenomenal control of a very large number of texts, published as well as unpublished, and few seem to have had the courage to engage in a critical dialogue with him.

When I arrived at the Oriental Institute in Chicago in the summer of 1967, I was shown the vast file room on the third floor, where every known text in the Akkadian language was stored on cards in scores of cabinets. One single group of files had been placed apart in four cabinets that stood rather forlornly in a corner of the room: they contained cards with the Old Assyrian texts. Every other Akkadian text had been integrated in the general file, but not the Old Assyrian documents – a clear indication of the common view that these documents were different, perhaps even unintelligible, representing a strange form of Akkadian and reflecting the life of a socio-economic system that was, if not unique, then at least remarkably unlike the rest of Mesopotamian traditions. The Old Assyrian files had not even been kept up, so the publications of hundreds of texts were not to be found on the cards. As late as 2001 Erica Reiner, a brilliant scholar who spent most of her life at the Oriental Institute working on the great *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, wrote an article entitled “Who Is Afraid of Old Assyrian?” in which she compared the well-known Old Babylonian grammatical forms with the Old Assyrian ones; she ended with the acute observation “that true understanding of Old Assyrian texts depends on the understanding of and familiarity with the societal and economic background of the documents”.⁷ When she was writing, great advances had already been achieved, but her title alone indicates the lingering feeling that there was something problematic about the Old Assyrian texts.

Apart from possible personal sym- and antipathies, the long-lasting unfortunate situation was, I believe, rooted in the disagreement between Lewy and Landsberger over the fundamental question: “Why were the Assyrians in Anatolia?” Lewy maintained from the start that they were to be seen

as conquerors and settlers, and he suggested the existence of what he termed *das altassyrische Grossreich*, an early empire linking Anatolia with the Assyrian heartland in northern Iraq. In an article of 1956 he spoke of “Assur’s Anatolian dominion”, referring to it as “Halys Assyria”.⁸ In complete contrast, Landsberger saw the Assyrian presence in terms of a commercial expansion of merchants, who operated in Anatolia under the protection of the local rulers. He brushed aside the notion of an empire based on Assyrian military power as “unthinkable”: he pointed out that the texts completely fail to mention any imperial officers or administrators, that Assur itself was a small, relatively insignificant city-state that could hardly have sustained a mighty empire and that a series of independent polities were known to have existed in the regions between Anatolia and Assur.

It will readily be understood that such divergent views had repercussions for the understanding of the texts and the many technical terms appearing in them. To take an example, for Lewy the word *kārum* denoted a civic institution in Anatolia, part of the imperial political structure, but for Landsberger it meant a colony of merchants. Landsberger offered a synthesis of his views in a booklet in 1925, aptly entitled “Assyrische Handelskolonien in Kleinasien”, a presentation that has come to stand as the fundamental analysis of the main elements in the social, commercial and political structures of the period. His interpretations have become the foundation for the modern understanding of the Old Assyrian period, and his translations of about thirty-five texts scattered in the booklet are amazingly precise.

Nevertheless, it took a long time for these views to be generally accepted, and Lewy certainly never abandoned his own interpretation. Two basic questions had to be answered, and there were obviously two different replies to them. One concerned the relationship between the Assyrians and the local Anatolians, where Lewy argued that the latter were forced to swear oaths of allegiance to the Assyrian authorities, whereas Landsberger referred simply to treaty agreements between Anatolian kings and the Assyrians. Actually, very few of the thousands of known texts were in any way concerned with these matters, and the handful of texts that did contain information about treaties and negotiations between Assyrians and local rulers were subject to divergent interpretations.⁹ It is only recently that actual treaties have become known.

The second fundamental matter concerned the mechanics of the Assyrian trade, and one has to say that in the furious debate concerning the rare political references in letters, usually rather offhand remarks, the basic questions of the daily existence of the Assyrians and Anatolians receded into the

background. The economic basis for the commercial system was not studied in detail, and, in fact, the hundreds or thousands of texts, especially letters, that were concerned with the daily activities of the Assyrians were largely neglected. Accordingly, although all agreed that the texts reflected the existence of a flourishing commercial system, it was not even clear precisely which commodities were involved in the trade. Lewy suggested in his presidential address to the American Oriental Society delivered in Princeton in April 1957 that the Assyrians were engaged in bringing vast quantities of argentiferous lead to Anatolia. He pointed out that it might seem difficult to explain such an import, which was really a case of bringing coal to Newcastle, since Asia Minor has rich lead deposits itself. His ingenious, albeit slightly ridiculous, explanation was that the Assyrians were “likely to have been short of the fuel necessary for the generation of temperatures high enough to separate the silver from the lead. The continuous exports to Asia Minor of lead ores of which we read in hundreds of Kültepe texts may therefore be attributed to the necessity of desilverizing the lead in a well-wooded country.”¹⁰ In other words, the Assyrians shipped vast quantities of lead to Anatolia in order for it to be melted down so that its silver content could be extracted. This silver was then shipped back to Assur.

It was all a matter of one word, *annukum*, which Lewy wanted to denote “lead”, whereas others saw it as the designation for another metal, namely tin. His remarkable hypothesis was in fact closely connected with his view of the political situation, since he also claimed that “when conquering and colonizing parts of Asia Minor, the Assyrians took precautions to prevent the natives from acquiring new weapons. It goes without saying that such a policy was certainly accompanied by regulations which made it unlawful for Assyrian merchants ... to engage in the bronze trade.” Therefore, there could be no question of the Assyrian merchants bringing tin to Anatolia, for that was a necessary ingredient to be alloyed with copper in order to produce bronze. The opposing view was that the Assyrian merchants were in fact sending huge amounts of tin to Anatolia, where the local societies can be described as being in the archaeologically determined Middle Bronze Age, the period when the use of tin-bronze became common.

In 1965, after the death of Lewy, Landsberger wrote an article called “Tin and Lead: The Adventures of Two Vocables”, in which with great erudition, and some mischievous pleasure, he demolished Lewy’s cumbersome interpretation and made it clear that this commodity, which was imported into Anatolia in large quantities, was indeed tin.¹¹

Landsberger ended his article with the question: “How can we rationalize the fact that the journey toward determining the meaning of our two

vocables ... has taken so many years, and that even today no single solution is accepted by all Assyriologists?" We might also ask the uncomfortable question, How could the study of the Old Assyrian texts have been dominated for so very long by a paradigm that today has no defenders, that in hindsight even seems rather silly? Why did it take until 1963, when the French scholar Paul Garelli published a general study of the Old Assyrian period, for the actually rather obvious basic interpretation to become established?

One simple reason is that Assyriology is a very small academic discipline with an enormous empirical base in the form of around a million texts from a period of three thousand years, so there were lots of other problems, felt to be less complex and more rewarding, for scholars to concentrate on. The unpleasantness of the debate between Lewy and Landsberger, the fact that two diametrically opposing paradigms for an understanding of the society described by the texts loomed over the field, forcing any scholar to take sides in the conflict, and finally the obvious difficulty of dealing with the steadily growing mass of complex texts were enough to dissuade many from becoming engaged in Old Assyrian studies.

Paul Garelli was a pupil of Julius Lewy, but he came to the conclusion during his own research that his teacher's interpretation of the Old Assyrian commercial and political system was untenable. The results of his analysis were presented in a book published in 1963, and this work inaugurated a new era in the study of the Old Assyrian texts. The discussion of Lewy's ideas was so extensive and careful that there could no longer be any question of taking them seriously.¹² The Assyrians were in Anatolia as merchants, not as conquerors, and they conducted a massive commercial operation in which large quantities of tin and textiles were shipped to Anatolia from Assur in order to be sold there; large amounts of silver (i.e., money) were then sent back to Assur to be invested in new caravans.

It was now possible to concentrate on the analysis of the commerce, beginning in 1967 with my own analysis of the caravan procedures; to study the complex and occasionally very difficult technical terminology used in the commercial operations, a task carried out in elaborate detail by Veenhof in 1972 in a book entitled *Aspects of Old Assyrian Trade and Its Terminology*; to come to grips with the relationship between the local, Anatolian institutions and the Assyrian community; and to investigate the nature of the Assyrian political and social system, studied by myself in a book with the title *The Old Assyrian City-State and Its Colonies*, published in 1976.

This presentation builds on the substantial progress in our understanding that has been achieved by a group of dedicated scholars during the past

four decades. Studies of individual merchant archives gave us a new understanding of the organisation of the trade and the role of the families (Larsen in 1982; Ichisar in 1981; Michel in 1991); the trade in copper in Anatolia was studied by Dercksen (1996); old and new archives were published in a series of books, some in the new series *Ankara Kültepe Tabletleri*, volume 1 in 1990, by Bilgiç in collaboration with Sever, Günbattı and Bayram; volume 2 in 1995, edited by Bilgiç and Bayram; volume 3 in 1995, edited by Bilgiç and Günbattı; volume 4 in 2006, edited by Albayrak; volume 5 in 2010, by Veenhof; and volume 6a in 2010, 6b in 2013 and 6c in 2014 by myself. In 1997 Michel and Garelli edited another volume in a separate series. A collection of more than four hundred letters was made available in translation by Michel in 2001.

CHRONOLOGY AND CHANGE

THERE ARE COMPETING CHRONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS FOR THE ANCIENT Near East, and precise anchors in the form of references to astronomical events such as eclipses of moon or sun, which allow an exact date giving not only year but month and sometimes hours and minutes, cannot with certainty be established before the first millennium BC. Nevertheless, the difference between the competing systems is not very great, usually a few decades, and sometimes less than that. We have come a long way from the more or less enlightened guesses that characterised many earlier attempts to create order. The reader will note that I shall give a number of precise dates in the coming chapters, and I wish to make it clear that they represent in my view the most plausible reconstruction of the chronology of the Old Assyrian period, but it should be understood that they are quite possibly to be superseded by even better analyses that can make use of new evidence.

The construction of a convincing chronological scheme must build on the combination of a great variety of data – many that are of questionable value, others that allow divergent interpretations and conclusions and a few that seem rock solid. We have first the textual evidence, primarily in the form of lists of rulers or dates, which have to be correlated with thousands of dates found in documents of practice. In principle one should be able to take the list of Assyrian rulers and count backwards from the kings of the first millennium to reach precise dates for the Old Assyrian kings in Assur. Unfortunately, the texts do not by any means have that kind of precision, there are gaps and ill-defined entries and, although the documents as a whole may represent the best scholarship of the learned historians at the neo-Assyrian court in the eighth century BC, they fall far short of the demands we have to make of them.

Other texts reflect the ancients' view of chronology in a different way, for some kings who built or repaired palaces and temples in Assyria appear

to have discovered foundation deposits with inscriptions from an earlier builder, and they occasionally tell us how long before their own time this king would have ruled. Such information is usually called *Distanzangaben*. It would clearly have been important for a royal builder to discover such earlier foundation deposits, and he would have asked the scholars in his service what the lists and other texts could tell them; remarkably, the dates they offer are close to the chronological constructions we can now present, which indicates that they made use of basically the same information that is now available to us. However, these inscriptions can be used primarily to test our results which have been reached on the basis of other observations.

A few documents mention celestial phenomena, and they have been objects of truly intense scrutiny. Observations of the planet Venus made during the reign of an Old Babylonian king called Ammi-saduqa have been enthusiastically embraced by some scholars, whereas others are deeply sceptical about their value, primarily because later copyists have introduced obvious mistakes in the text. The most commonly used system, the so-called Middle chronology, posits that the Old Babylonian period ended in the year 1595 BC. It will be found in almost all general books on the ancient Near East not because it is believed to be “superior to alternatives, [but] because it is the most commonly used.”¹

There is also a so-called High chronology, sixty-four years higher, and now an “Ultra-Low” system which is about a century lower than the Middle chronology. Each of these schemes is based on different interpretations of texts, archaeology and sometimes natural phenomena such as astronomical data or the counting of tree rings. Meetings and seminars are being organised all the time to discuss the merits and demerits of the various suggestions, but it seems impossible to determine how far away we are from consensus.

The system that I have used here has been elaborated in a book by Gojko Barjamovic, Thomas Hertel and myself.² It is very much dependent on dendrochronology, the study of tree rings, a methodology that seems particularly relevant to the study of the Old Assyrian period in view of the many logs, often with the bark preserved, recovered from the palaces in Kanesh and at Acemhöyük in central Anatolia. On the basis of the sequences established by the dendrochronologists, we can see when buildings such as the palaces on the mound at Kültepe were constructed and when major repairs were made, and in lucky situations we can correlate these observations with the finding of texts that refer to known persons. Although our analysis builds on this kind of evidence and ignores the arguments developed from the Venus observations, our results in fact seem to correlate extremely well with

the Middle chronology. Additionally, they can be made to fit the so-called *Distanzangaben* referred to earlier.

We have a small number of lists of eponyms from the archives at Kanesh and some more elaborate (but badly damaged and fragmentary) lists from the palace at Mari, where the dating system from Assur was introduced during the reign of Shamshi-Adad I. Those lists are particularly interesting because they contain references to important events in the various years. The most complete list from Kanesh also indicates the length of the reigns of the Old Assyrian kings, ending at some point during the reign of Naram-Suen. The lists all begin when the eponymic system was introduced at the beginning of the reign of King Erishum I. Most of the lists take us no further than eponym 129, but one text, unfortunately somewhat broken, covers the late period, linking up with the first group so that we have a sequence (with certain holes) of more than 250 years.

Since the eponymic system was made use of in all of the north Mesopotamian region during the short reign of Shamshi-Adad I, we have had a rich opportunity to combine the evidence from the eponym lists with texts from a variety of sites. The recent publication of these lists inspired our study referred to earlier, but it is unclear as yet whether the system used here will convince the many scholars who are working on the issues of chronology.

In one of the lists of eponyms from the palace at Mari there is a likely reference to a solar eclipse in a year covered by this sequence, in fact the year that Shamshi-Adad I is said to have been born, and if properly understood this could then give us a precise date. However, solar eclipses occur with some frequency, and they are not visible outside a fairly narrow geographical band. Since we do not really know where the observation was made, whether it was a total eclipse and so on, there are several possible solutions, none of which appear entirely to fit the scheme developed by us. The whole construction may therefore have to be moved, maybe as much as thirty years, but in my view that is utterly acceptable. We are dealing with events that took place nearly four thousand years ago, so personally I cannot be upset by a few decades. The absolute dates I shall continue to propose have to be understood in this light.³

In my view the establishment of a reliable relative chronology promises to give us more fascinating information, since the discovery and publication of the eponym lists provide us with a new tool for understanding the lives of individuals and families. When correlated with the dated texts where individuals are named, the information in the list of years allows us to place the named persons precisely in time.

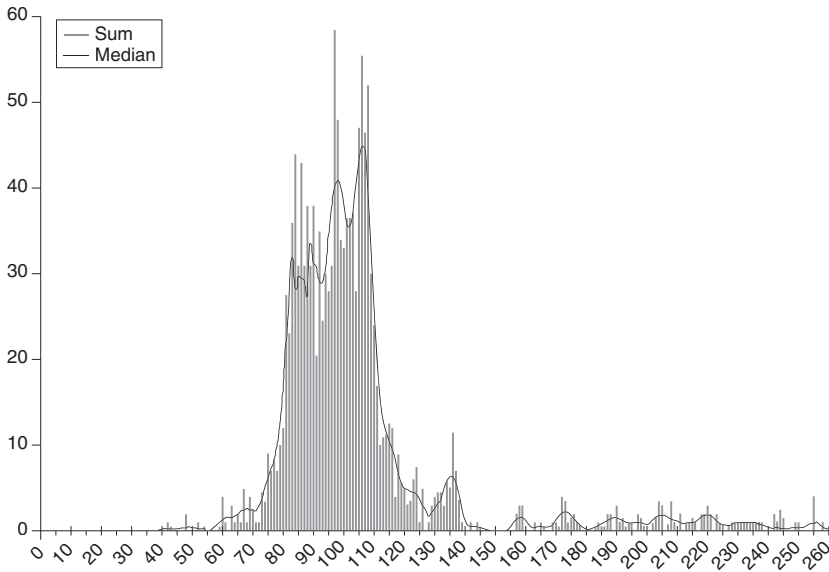
We therefore rely on texts that contain dates, and in fact only a few document types do so. Debt notes are the most obvious example, and apart from them we find reference to dates only occasionally in other types of texts such as legal documents and letters. A debt note is usually phrased as follows:

A owes an amount of silver to B. Reckoned from the week of C, month X, year eponymy D, he has to pay back the loan within n weeks. If he fails to pay in time, he will add interest (according to stipulated rules). Witnessed by E, F, G and so on.

The information to be gleaned from dated texts will have to be combined with detailed studies of the prosopography of the Assyrian families, establishing the identity and kinship relations of all the individuals found in such contexts, and that is a vast undertaking which demands considerable computer power. Once that is done it will be possible to link a large number of persons to precise dates, which again will allow us to establish or confirm genealogies and sometimes personal histories. Moreover, events mentioned in groups of texts can now be placed in sequence, so that we can see how this lawsuit followed upon that conflict and so on. The potential for detailed micro-historical analyses is enormous as more archives are published and can be drawn into the network of relationships and events. That work has only just begun, and the suggestions and results presented in this book must therefore be considered to be somewhat preliminary.

Another fundamental observation concerns the spread of our documentation over the entire chronological span of the Old Assyrian period, some 250 years. Included in the book by Barjamovic, Hertel and Larsen that I mentioned earlier is a graph prepared by Thomas Hertel of all the known dated texts, based on the ca. 10,000 documents to which we have access in our database in Copenhagen. About 1,200 of these contained a date, and these were plotted on a graph, which gave an astonishing result.

As shown by the graph (Figure 17), more than 90 percent of the texts fall within a period of about thirty years, roughly from 80 to 110 in the sequence of eponym years. The first forty years of the existence of the eponymic system are entirely undocumented, and a very sudden explosion in the number of texts begins around year 75, reaching a new height around year 80; after a period of about thirty years there is a dramatic fall from about fifty texts per year to fewer than ten. Intriguingly there seems to be a beginning resurgence after year 130, but it never really takes off, for we find a new collapse in year 139, when we know that the lower city at Kanesh was destroyed by fire. The more than a hundred years of level 1b that follow are documented by only a handful of dated texts in each year, but the evidence is spread evenly over the entire period.



17. Graph of the dated texts plotted on a grid showing the number of texts and the sequence of eponymies. From Barjamovic, Hertel and Larsen 2012.

The graph forces us to conclude that the decline or collapse around year 110 reflected in the sudden drop in the number of dated texts was unrelated to the destruction of the palace and the lower town at Kültepe, for those events took place some thirty years after the decline in our documentation. It is also clear that this destruction did not result in a long break in the trade, for Assyrians returned to Kanesh after only a couple of years and began rebuilding the settlement and the commercial system. Archaeological observations had been the basis for a hypothesis that the lower town was abandoned for maybe as many as fifty years, but dated documents begin to appear here much earlier, and there does not seem to have been a significant hiatus. We must assume that a very gradual process started shortly after the destruction, but it probably took several years before the settlement had regained something like its original strength. Interestingly, during almost a decade in the years around 150 we have no texts at all.

If the destruction of the palace on the mound and the fire that consumed the lower town were in fact unrelated events, it might be possible to suggest another date for the fire, for instance shortly after year 110, which would allow us to posit a causal relationship between the decline in the documentation and the fire. This seems unlikely, however, for a variety

of reasons, but maybe it cannot simply be ruled out. I shall disregard that possibility here.

It has long been clear that the textual documentation was unevenly spread over the period of the Old Assyrian presence at Kanesh, but the abruptness of both the rise and the decline of the number of texts came as a surprise. In view of the number of texts and archives represented in the graph, it is not possible to think of the result as non-representative. Not only that, the number of dated texts must correspond to the level of economic activity in the Old Assyrian community, since they document the frequency of credits extended: credit operations were inextricably linked to the caravan trade, since they were the vehicle for the sale of the goods imported to Anatolia. Without debt notes, the commercial activities could not happen in the same way.

The fact that the Old Assyrian activity in Anatolia clearly falls into distinct phases, where the bulk of our documentation stems from a brief period of some thirty years, has consequences for many aspects of our understanding of the history and dynamics of the trade. The tentative statistics proposed for the volume of trade and the number of Assyrians present at any time in the colonies are obviously affected, when practically all our information concerns only a short period of thirty years.

In a general way these conclusions are in harmony with the reconstructed family trees for a number of prominent merchants. We can in some cases include up to four or five generations, but the vast majority of the texts available are concerned with only two; the oldest men referred to are known almost exclusively as the no longer living fathers of the people who dominate the period of the greatest activity. They are in most instances being assisted by their own sons, but their grandsons are rarely mentioned.

We may take the family of Shalim-Assur as an example:⁴

Generation 1: Ur-SIG₅ (probably to be read as Bashtum-damqat), attested only as an ancestor, probably alive during the time of (or shortly after) the Ur III domination of Assur.

Generation 2: his son Issu-arik, sparsely attested as active between eponym years 42 and 85 (ca. 1931–1888 BC).

Generation 3: his children Assur-bel-awatim, Iddin-abum, Shalim-Assur and a daughter whose name is not known; this is the first permanently settled generation in Anatolia. Iddin-abum died ca. 1885; Shalim-Assur died in eponym year 102 (1871 BC).

Generation 4: Shalim-Assur's children: the daughters Lamassi and Shat-Anna and the sons Ennam-Assur and Ali-ahum. Ennam-Assur

is attested in texts from eponym year 85 to his death in 105 or 106 (1888–1867/68). Ali-ahum disappears from the record in year 110. The daughter Shat-Anna, who was married to an Anatolian called Shuppi-numan, appears as late as year 135.⁵

Generation 5: Ennam-Assur had a daughter whose name is not known; she figures in a legal suit after his death. The younger brother Ali-ahum had a son called Mannum-ki-iliya, and it is likely that there was even a sixth generation in the family, since this man appears to have had a son called Kukuwa, who is found as a witness with his patronymic in a text that belongs to the last phase of level 2.⁶

Obviously, not all families fit into the same generational scheme, and in most cases the first known generation corresponds to Issu-arik in the Shalim-Assur family. The general characteristics of the many families are the same, however, since we find that nearly the entire attestation concerns what would be generations 3 and 4 in the scheme just presented, although in most families it would be the second and third generations attested. In each case, the first generation who has left documents, in the Shalim-Assur family represented by Issu-arik, are the men who laid the foundation for the Old Assyrian commercial explosion, the pioneers who built up the level of activity to a point where the scale of enterprises allowed for a division of labour. A similar pattern has been described for the Renaissance trade in Europe, which saw a radical development that has been called “the commercial revolution of the thirteenth century”.⁷ This has been described by Spufford:

Businesses became large enough and continuous enough to maintain three separate parties: the sedentary merchants remaining full-time in northern Italy, who specialized in the financing and organization of import-export trade; the specialist carriers ... who took the goods from the principals to their agents; and thirdly the full-time agents themselves, resident overseas or beyond the Alps, who devoted their energies to sales or purchases according to the instructions sent to them by their principals.⁸

It was the creation of such an organisational structure that must have happened around eponym years 75–80, inaugurating a period of furious commercial activity that left us a rich archive of texts of all kinds. Practically all of the known archives from the houses in the lower town at Kültepe fall into this slot, and the majority simply end between eponym years 105 and 110. That is the case also of the Shalim-Assur archive. We can still wonder (or worry, according to inclination) at the suddenness of the events when the archives began, but a more detailed explanation cannot be offered given the present state of our knowledge.

There can hardly be any doubt that the accumulation of texts in the course of a few years is a reflection of a change in the way the Assyrian merchants conducted their trade and lived their lives. There was suddenly a need to communicate in writing with shareholders, suppliers, customers, agents and partners, contracts had to be set up and letters written. The period before this happened was most probably characterised by a commercial pattern which may be called *venture trade*; that is, the merchants travelled regularly between Assur and Kanesh, spending only one or two years in Anatolia in connection with the sale of their consignments, which were based on investments by the financiers in Assur. The traders were therefore not settled in households in Kanesh and other colonies but had their families and close commercial ties in Assur. As explained in the preceding quote, this pattern was then replaced by one in which the main merchants no longer travelled with their own caravans, but instead became “desk-bound” managers, agents of the bosses in Assur, and had professional carriers take care of the physical transportation of goods.

This obviously successful system broke down after only one generation, a development that requires an explanation. How can we account for the drastic fall in the number of texts around eponym year 110? The fact that the decline happened about thirty years before the destruction of the lower town means that a sudden calamity of some kind is an unlikely explanation. There is reason to believe that when the final disaster in ca. 1835 was imminent, the inhabitants of the houses removed all their valuables and fled. It could be suggested that the Assyrians therefore also removed all the current documents, especially the dated debt notes, which were in fact worth money, but it seems highly improbable that all the Assyrian archive owners would have taken away the texts dated twenty-five years earlier.

Another possibility is that Kanesh stopped being the vitally important hub for the Assyrian trade and that after the deaths of a large group of prominent merchants their sons decided to move away from Kanesh to settle in other colonies, maintaining only a skeleton crew in the houses of their fathers.⁹ We know that the Kanesh colony continued as an important centre for the Assyrians in the colonies and trading stations, but it is also clear that in the texts from the heyday of the trade there are signs that some members of the families had in fact settled in other towns where economic interests were becoming more important. Shalim-Assur, himself one of the significant traders of the second generation, is known to have spent the last years of his life in Durhumit, the main centre for the trade in copper, and he left the running of the affairs in Kanesh to his sons. That city was becoming a kind of

entry station into Anatolia, and a great deal of the commercial life was now centred on the colonies in Durhumit and Purushaddum.

This theory has considerable merit, to be sure, but it fails to convince as a full explanation. Kanesh remained the administrative Assyrian centre, and the local rulers there would surely have done all they could to retain a position of predominance in the commerce. Any caravan going to Purushaddum, for instance, would have to pass through Kanesh, where taxes would be paid, and one would expect that our evidence would reflect such a changed situation in the form of letters and contracts. But as far as we know from the currently studied texts, the trade continued along the same lines right up until the collapse.

In my view the decreasing number of texts must reflect a decline in the economic activity of the Assyrian community. The few dated documents from the succeeding phase seem to show that the import of tin and textiles from Assur diminished, and individual transactions in wool and copper – that is, activities within the borders of Anatolia itself – became more important. The high-volume, active commercial system that can be followed in about thirty years cannot be documented any more after around year 110. This decrease could have its roots in problems of supply, for it is well established that the Old Assyrian trade centred on Anatolia was dependent on constant deliveries of tin and textiles from southern Mesopotamia to Assur. Wars in distant regions from where the goods originated or through which the trade had to pass could obviously have a drastic effect on the life of the Assyrians in Anatolia.

This explanation is certainly possible, but we have no evidence with which to support it. Instead we may look at the dynamics built into the Old Assyrian social and commercial systems for an alternative interpretation. In this context I would point to one of the most remarkable features of the family archives known so far, namely that a number of the most prominent traders appear to have died within the span of a few years around the eponym year 105 (1968 BC).

Merchant	Eponym Year of Death
Shalim-Assur son of Issu-arik	104
Pushu-ken son of Sueyya	102–103
Puzur-Assur son of Ishar-kitti-Assur	110–11
Imdi-ilum son of Shu-Laban	104
Elamma son of Iddin-Suen	98–106
Ali-ahum son of Iddin-Suen	105
Ali-ahum son of Sukuhum	102

One of the most characteristic features of the archives from the heyday of the trade is the importance of the death of senior merchants. This often led to prolonged legal conflicts, pitting heirs against each other and against the customers of the deceased trader. Complex lawsuits usually resulted;¹⁰ these came to involve the city assembly in Assur, and they often lasted for several years. During such periods it seems that the affairs of the family would be frozen by orders from the city assembly, which declared that it would be illegal to engage in economic and commercial operations with the assets left by the deceased until a final settlement of credits and debts had been established by the city assembly. The complications involved in these procedures were intensified by the fact that the Assyrian community was dispersed over a very large area and that many people were in more or less constant movement. Attempts to introduce delays or engage in dubious legal manoeuvres by less than scrupulously honest people were often successful. And all this must have imposed an enormous strain on the finances of the family, despite the fact that very wealthy businessmen were involved.

A letter to be discussed later,¹¹ in which we read that the city assembly has decided to make it possible for defaulting debtors who had been forced to sell their houses to buy them back on favourable terms, may reasonably be dated to the period around year 110; if that is correct, it indicates that at this time a crisis of some kind had arisen in Assur, one that had created very real hardship for many people. The reason for this is uncertain, but it could well be understood as a reflection of the difficulties connected with the death of several prominent merchants.

Since the commercial system was to a large extent built on credit, a complex network of debt obligations involved all the participants in the system, and the constant turnover of cash operations would suffer a serious setback when the death of a merchant resulted in the abrupt cessation of his activities. If we assume that not just one player, but perhaps as many as ten major families were within the span of a few years taken out of the active trade, the consequences must have been severe.

Certain factors built into the Old Assyrian system exacerbated the situation: there was no clear tradition for the transition from one generation to the next; there was no family fund, since ownership to capital was individual; the dispersed nature of the Assyrian community created difficulties of communication; the city assembly in Assur introduced rigid rules for the settling of accounts for deceased merchants; and finally there was a lack of developed bookkeeping practices.

Accordingly, I suggest that a combination of social, legal and commercial factors associated with the disappearance of a generation of major traders

and heads of families resulted in successive blackouts in interdependent parts of the commercial network. The end result was an economic recession which is visible in the dramatic decrease of texts in the archives at Kanesh.

Despite the fact that most of the texts from the succeeding long period associated with level 1b in the lower town at Kanesh remain unpublished, the graph (Figure 17) shows that a small number of dated texts continue to be found in nearly every year. There are no clear changes or disruptions discernible during the following century, simply a steady trickle of texts. The trade certainly continued, presumably on a lower level, and the evidence indicates that it had changed character once again. Gone are the thousands of letters, for the pattern had apparently reverted full circle to a system of venture trade, and that did not leave a rich paper trail of letters and credit contracts. A great deal of the written evidence became largely unnecessary when the merchants dealt with their customers personally.

We have no reference to the joint-stock partnership anymore, and instead we find the short-term partnership referred to as *tappā'uttum*.¹² Clearly, the Assyrians continued to conduct centred trade on Anatolia, and there are a few indications that they were in fact flourishing. It has been observed that the houses of level 1b in the lower town are in general bigger than those of level 2 and were clearly built to last with heavy stone foundations. It is not clear at the moment whether the overall size of the settlement was smaller in the later phase, with fewer Assyrians having houses there, but at the present state of publication it seems that level 1b spread over all of the now excavated area.

The majority of the texts from level 1b remain unpublished, a common feature of the evidence from Kültepe and one that makes our understanding of the developments after the flourishing period particularly precarious. The first analysis offered by Kemal Balkan in his study of the chronology of Kültepe¹³ suggested that the trade was very impoverished: imports to Anatolia were now restricted to poor garments, nails and bristles meant for the production of brushes; tin no longer appeared, nor did any of the many varieties of luxury textiles. This was in fact not a likely situation, for it failed to explain the large Assyrian presence in the lower town. What were these people doing? It has now become clear that Balkan's ideas, based on a very small number of texts, were inadequate and that a much wider range of commodities were traded: silver, gold, cups made of meteoric iron, tin, textiles, lapis lazuli and slaves are mentioned as the goods traded by a partnership of an Assyrian Eddin-Assur and two Anatolian brothers.¹⁴ We cannot on the basis of the available evidence say anything about the quantities involved, but a letter from the palace at Mari refers to a single caravan of

three hundred donkeys traversing northern Syria from Assur, en route to Kanesh, so even if this refers to only an annual caravan (and there is nothing that points to that conclusion), it indicates a substantial import trade in the late period.¹⁵ Other texts from Mari show that caravans valued at around 30 pounds of silver at regular intervals passed through towns in northern Syria, and the local rulers there were keen to promote their visit because of the income in taxes.¹⁶ Although these were clearly much smaller caravans consisting of a few donkeys, they testify to the continued strength of the overland circuit. Note also that the treaty with Hahhum somewhere during the level 1b period refers to the levying of taxes and the right of pre-emption “when a caravan has come up from the city of Assur, after fifty, a hundred or more loaded donkeys have been cleared.”¹⁷ All these references indicate that a trade of quite considerable dimensions continued in the later period.

On the other hand, Dercksen’s study of the available texts from the level 1b period appears to show that much smaller quantities are being referred to, and he sums up his observations as follows:

Except for the remaining wealthy traders, a general impoverishment is discernable, expressing itself not only in the volume of merchandise, but also in the number of cases where Assyrians had been detained by a native creditor for insolvency.¹⁸

Already during the later phase of level 2 at Kanesh we find indications of changes in the social and administrative structures. The week eponymy, presumably tied to the running of the affairs of the Office of the Colony, was abolished around eponym year 120 (ca. 1853 BC), and although it is difficult to offer a truly convincing explanation of this, the most likely reason is that the functions of these officials were taken over by others. This is, on the other hand, most probably related to the new importance of the group of persons called the “fee payers” (*ṣāqil dātīm*), who at this time begin to appear in contexts of power and influence. As will be argued later, this group is synonymous with the “men with an account” and the “big men” referred to in the Statutes of the Kanesh colony, so they were members of the elite group of merchants in Anatolia.

In the late level 2 archive belonging to Kuliya (dating to the last years before the destruction), we find a few letters written by the Kanesh colony that are concerned with the administration of the colonial system. Kuliya functioned as the official envoy of the Kanesh colony, travelling from place to place, and the letters with instructions he received from the Kanesh colony were addressed to “the fee payers, our messenger, every single colony and the trading stations” or “the fee payers, our messenger Kuliya, and the colonies

Durhumit, Hattush, Tawniya and Tuhpiya all the way until Nenashsha” and similar lists.¹⁹ The fee payers are always mentioned, and invariably before all other authorities, an indication of their paramount influence.

Another text from the period immediately prior to the destruction of level 2, kt 87/k 552, is a legal document that regulates a caravan investment; a certain Shu-Dagan has been given $3\frac{2}{3}$ pounds, 5 shekels of silver for purchases in Assur, and he agrees to pay back in Kanesh on his return (presumably after having sold the goods bought in Assur) the amount of 6 pounds, which is roughly double the investment. The witnesses are here said to have been given by “the fee payers, the residents of Tuhpiya and the travellers on the road to the City”. In texts of this type from the earlier phase of level 2, the witnesses were, of course, given by the colony, so we have here another indication of some rather momentous changes that underscore the power of the big men.

This terminology becomes standard in the texts from level 1b, where, for instance, we find a document regulating the redemption of a poor Assyrian family from debt slavery :

The fee payers, the travellers on the road to the City and the station at Mamma gave a verdict, as follows: Assur-malik son of Aduduwe, Urshisha, his wife, Ennam-Assur (and) Turam-Assur, his sons, and Zurupa, his slave girl, were indebted for $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of silver here to an Anatolian, and Eddin-Assur son of Ahiyaya has paid $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of silver to the Anatolian, has led Assur-malik, Urshisha, his wife, Ennam-Assur (and) Turam-Assur, his sons, and Zurupa, his slave girl, out of the Anatolian's house and they now work in Eddin-Assur's house.²⁰

The unhappy family have been rescued, but they are now indebted to Eddin-Assur, and only after they have paid him back will he release the debt note to them. It is interesting that the members of the family have both Assyrian and Anatolian names, a sign of the continuing blending and fusion of the two groups.

The nature of the arrangements that surround the position of the fee payers is fairly well understood, and it seems that their new appearance in judicial contexts points to an increase in their power, and therefore a change in the social system, where the big men came to dominate the life of the colonies. A growing inequality in the Assyrian community appears to have enhanced the disparity between small and big, and we may assume that a smaller group of super-rich and successful families were in a position to grab more power, a development that was already becoming visible around eponym year 110 (ca. 1863) in the case of Ali-ahum's unsuccessful attempt

to involve the assembly of the Kanesh colony in his fight against Itur-ili. He lamented the fact that his opponent could enlist the support of the big men, “so what can I say?”²¹

The precarious position of the so-called settlers or residents (*wašbūtum*) is not hard to understand. They were apparently being cut off from the fundamental commercial activities of the Assyrians, linked to the import from Assur; they had to an extent “gone native”, continuing the trend towards inter-marriage with the local population. One of the consequences of this was an increased exposure to the power of the local palace administration, as we can read in the late treaties with Kanesh and Hahhum discussed in Chapter 12. The mention of the demand for a fair trial in cases involving both Assyrians and local people, where the king is asked not to favour his own citizens, indicates that such problems were regarded as real and important; similarly, the treaties emphasise the need for protection of the Assyrian community, as explained by Veenhof:

The ruler must not allow, not leave a free hand to his citizens and other people who had taken refuge and stayed as foreigners in his city, to go to ... the household of an Assyrian to obtain satisfaction for a claim ... or to solve a conflict by forceful private action. Positively: the ruler must interfere and prevent such private attacks on Assyrian households.²²

Moreover, the ruler is not allowed to covet or appropriate Assyrian property, defined as houses, slaves, fields and gardens. This also indicates that the Assyrian “residents” had become truly integrated into Anatolian society, taking part in agricultural activities. Nevertheless, the Assyrians retained their position as members of the colonial community, so that they were free from duties to the crown that fell upon the local citizens, *corvée* and presumably military service; if the king issued an edict ordering the manumission of slaves, this would not apply to slaves belonging to Assyrians. They were also allowed in judicial contexts to swear their oaths before the emblems of Assur rather than submit to the local practices, such as the river ordeal.

One wonders whether this distinction between Anatolians and Assyrian “residents” could always be maintained, for instance when the Assyrian had a household of mixed ethnic character and was to only a limited extent part of the economic world of the colonies. The participation of the “residents” in the administration of justice and the like, together with the fee payers and the travellers to Assur, does indicate that in general it was upheld.

The group referred to as “travellers on the road to the City” then designates the people who maintained a close and intense commercial contact with Assur. At least some of them may have had houses in the colonies and

perhaps households with wives and slaves, but the distinguishing characteristic is that they were active in the overland trade and therefore travelled back and forth on the caravan trail. Their commercial activities are almost entirely undocumented.

It is interesting that this group of Assyrians is so clearly distinct from the fee payers, and this fact raises the question as to what the latter group in fact was basing their existence on. The significant point is presumably that they no longer travelled to Assur but that they directed the affairs of the colonies, and we may assume that they operated as investors in the overland trade.

These momentous changes in the nature of the Assyrian community must be understood as the result of dynamic developments in the commercial links between Assur and Anatolia, as well as a growing hybridisation of the society at Kanesh and in the other Anatolian kingdoms. The Assyrians became much more intensely involved in the local communities, and at the same time the Anatolians began to make more extensive use of the cuneiform writing tradition. Many legal texts that refer exclusively to Anatolians were written and certified by the local king and his leading officers, and this appears to be a genuine innovation.

We know next to nothing about the last years of the Assyrian presence in Anatolia, but we can assume that a very dramatic break put an end to the colonies, for the world of the early Hittite kingdom that ensued retained next to nothing of the Assyrian traditions. The writing practice changed to a dependence on a Syro-Mesopotamian tradition, where it seems that documents were now written primarily in Hittite. The story of Anitta, a king of Kanesh during the level 1b period, has been found at Boghazköy as a text written in Hittite; it has been suggested that this was a translation from Assyrian, which is perhaps not entirely implausible, but there really is nothing in the text that retains a memory of the existence of the Assyrian colonies.

Part II

The Home Town



ASSUR

IN HIS ANGRY LETTER TO THE WAYWARD SON IN ANATOLIA WHICH I quoted in Chapter 1, Assur-idi wrote about the warnings conveyed to him by the gods Assur and Assuritum, the two main deities in his home city. His direct contact with the gods probably took place at night, in his dreams, but he undoubtedly visited their temples regularly and obviously felt that he was in very close contact with them both. We know something about these temples from the excavations carried out at Assur during the first decade of the twentieth century, although unfortunately not nearly enough to provide us with a clear impression of the buildings that Assur-idi would have seen.

Contrary to what Julius Lewy assumed, there was no Assyria at the time of the settlement at Kanesh, only a relatively small city-state called Assur, but in later centuries it was to give name to the land, the kingdom and eventually the empire of Assyria: *māt Assur*, or “Assur-land”. Its ruins are located at a site called Qala Shergat, on a rocky spur that overlooks the river Tigris some 100 kilometres south of the modern Iraqi city of Mosul. The ruins within the walls and a deep moat measure about 700 by 600 metres plus an extension to the south, the “New Town”, which stretches another ca. 700 metres along the river. When it was most alive and successful, it probably had more than fifteen thousand inhabitants, but in the Old Assyrian period it was presumably somewhat smaller.¹

Today Assur is a desolate place and it is hard to visualise it as a vibrant, lively city full of activity and noise. In the springtime the waters of two branches of the river join below the tip of the rock on which sat the temple to the god Assur. From here one looks out over the water and the plain that stretches toward the east, where it meets the foothills of the Zagros Mountains. When the water in the river is high, there is a constant rippling murmur as the water rushes past the city, and the fields on the other bank are green and lush. In the fall the river shrinks to a much smaller, slower stream,

and one can see turtles and water snakes lazily investigating crenellations from ancient walls that fell into the water long ago.

Assur was excavated during a decade at the beginning of the twentieth century by one of the finest, most meticulous archaeologists of the time, the German Walter Andrae. He developed sophisticated methods for dealing with and analysing the extremely complex stratigraphy of the site, and he oversaw the publication of a series of reports on the finds. And yet, when it comes to the Old Assyrian period, the time when Assur was the mother city for a number of commercial colonies in Syria and Anatolia, Andrae's excavations provided very little concrete information. There were several reasons for this.

In the later periods of its existence, the ancient city was divided rather clearly into distinct zones, with official buildings – temples, a ziggurat and a palace – in the northern part of the settlement, along a dramatic cliff rising 20 metres vertically from the river; the rest of the urban area seems in all periods to have been taken up by a maze of narrow streets and densely clustered private houses. The extent of the city in the Old Assyrian period cannot be determined. In line with the priorities of the time, Andrae and his team concentrated their efforts on the public buildings, and the rest of the city was investigated by way of a series of search trenches, 10 metres wide and spaced at every 100 metres. The result today is that the modern visitor sees a desolate, dry landscape where once there was a thriving city and where the trenches seem to carry memories of the killing fields in Flanders.

The city had a long and complex history, and over the centuries Assur certainly saw its share of death and disaster. In the Old Assyrian period it was a city-state that was dependent on its place in the network of long-distance trade; later, during the centuries in the middle of the second millennium BC, it seems to have become politically dominated by a large state or empire referred to as Mitanni, which had its centre in northern Syria. How or exactly when Assur was able to free itself is unclear, but around 1350 BC the first mention is made of the land called Assyria, "Assur-land", which indicates that the creation of a territorial state in what is now northern Iraq rested upon political and military initiatives originating in Assur.

This city was where the kings of Assyria resided for centuries – in fact, until the mid-ninth century, when the king Assurnasirpal II moved the political capital to a new city called Kalhu, modern Nimrud, some 50 kilometres north of Assur. Until the final indignity in 614 BC of Assur's capture and sack by the Medes, the city had been the wealthy religious capital of Assyria, full of large and small houses, many of which were occupied, it seems, by families who were in some fashion associated with the main temple to the god Assur.

This long history has left us a vastly complicated field of ruins which present a huge challenge to any excavator. The massive Neo-Assyrian public buildings, palaces and temples constituted a special set of problems. Only very poorly preserved remains of early constructions remained, since in several cases the later builders had seriously damaged or entirely removed the walls of previous buildings in order to establish firm foundations for their own. We therefore have very little knowledge of the main buildings from the earliest periods of the life of the city.

The search trenches, on the other hand, were filled with remains of houses, but only in very few cases did the excavators uncover more than isolated rooms which happened to be located within a trench, and they chose not to penetrate below the Middle and Neo-Assyrian levels. We are accordingly in the dark with respect to the residential quarters of the city in the earliest period, and we cannot even say where the walls encircling the urban area were.²

Not a single Old Assyrian private house was excavated, and there are accordingly no extensive archives that could match the ones from Kanesh. We have only a small collection of texts (twenty-four) from Assur that can be said with certainty to belong to the period of the colonies in Anatolia. Almost half of these are school texts, showing how the value of various commodities was to be computed in silver, and they seem to prove the existence of a school in Assur at the time, where young persons learnt elements of the practicalities of the merchant's craft.³ The rest of the texts are scattered fragments of little interest.⁴

From the extensive archives found at Kültepe we have hundreds of letters written by men and women who lived in Assur, but their houses are still waiting to be excavated. A single important grave from the Old Assyrian period was found during the excavations at Assur. Many tombs in the city were located under the floors of buildings, often in a kind of crypt which was reused many times during the life of the building, but this particular grave seems to have been a simple rectangular hole. The skeleton had almost entirely disappeared, but the grave was particularly interesting because of the rich grave goods given to the dead person. A dagger and a spear of bronze indicate that the deceased was male, but in view of the poor preservation of the bones this could have to do with a double or even multiple burial, which could perhaps explain the presence of several items of jewellery usually associated with women. Of special interest are four so-called diadems, thin strips of gold which had been placed over the eyes, mouth and ears of the dead, for precisely similar practices are known from the graves found under the houses of the lower town at Kanesh (Figure 18). Jewellery in the



18. Skull from Kültepe with the characteristic gold covers also known from the Old Assyrian grave at Assur. Kültepe Excavation Archives.

form of necklaces made of gold, carnelian, lapis lazuli and rock crystal, earrings of gold and lapis, no less than twenty-six golden small rings and beads of various kinds were distributed on the upper body of the corpse, and at the feet were several metal bowls, beakers and buckets, apparently an elaborate drinking service for two persons. Finally, three cylinder seals were in the grave, all made of lapis lazuli.⁵

It seems likely that the grave was that of a wealthy Assyrian businessman who had close relations with the colonies in Anatolia, and the elaborate and rich find gives us a hint about the wealth and luxury that developed there as a result of the lucrative role Assur played in the international trade. This could for all we know be the grave of the old Assur-idi, buried with a sample of his riches.

The textual evidence that could throw light on the history of the city and the religious and political institutions is almost as poor as that concerned with the lives of private citizens. Hidden in the foundations of some of the later official buildings the excavators found a few Old Assyrian royal

inscriptions commemorating the completion of a building project. They give us the names of kings with their genealogies, and they tell us which buildings were being erected for the greater glory of the gods, the king and the community. Nearly all these inscriptions are brief and provide only glimpses of the life of the city. Moreover, as we know from the documentation from Kanesh, they tend to give us a stereotyped, skewed image of the political structure of the community. On the basis of these texts alone we would have had to conclude that Assur was a small, rather insignificant town which played no particular role in the political or commercial history of the time. We see the kings as the builders of temples and fortifications, and Assur in no way appears to distinguish itself from the well-known patterns of urbanism in Mesopotamia. Remarkably, not only do the texts from Kanesh not fit this picture at all, they contradict it in several respects. And since there is so little information to be gleaned from the excavations of Assur, we are in the extraordinary situation of having to rely on the texts from a commercial colony to inform us about conditions in the capital and home city. To some extent we are studying the shadows on the wall.

The early history of the city, from its founding until the Old Assyrian period, that is, around 2000 BC, is shrouded in darkness. It is unclear exactly when Assur was first settled, but the German excavations found no traces going back before the so-called Early Dynastic III period, roughly 2600–2350 BC.⁶ This designation refers to the political developments that took place in the many cities on the southern alluvium, urban centres that had already existed for hundreds or thousands of years. Assur was a latecomer by comparison, and it seems clear that its own cultural and religious life was heavily influenced from the south. This was the time when the oldest known temple in the city, dedicated to the goddess Ishtar, was built.⁷ The second, rebuilt version of this temple is well preserved and shows an inventory of cult objects that resembles finds from Sumerian temples in southern Mesopotamia. The cult room was 10 metres long and 6 metres wide, and at the northern end was a raised cella with a painted gypsum plaque showing the goddess. Along the walls were benches and on these were placed a series of votive statues of both men and women. On the floor stood several clay altars in the shape of a house in two stories. All of these objects have close parallels in Sumerian temples from the Early Dynastic period, but a single object, a fragmentary stone vessel, must be dated to at least 3000 BC, perhaps earlier, so it must have been an heirloom already when the earliest Ishtar temple was built.⁸ There are a few finds from other contexts that can be dated to the Early Dynastic period, but the evidence outside the Ishtar temple is scant indeed.

Although Assur may therefore be seen as a late northern version of the cities in the south, it was in certain ways peculiarly its own. The fact that the main god of the city, Assur, shares his name with the settlement or city sets the site and its religious traditions apart from everything else we know about Mesopotamian or Near Eastern religion. The earliest references indicate that divinity and site were seen as so inextricably connected that it is more correct to see them as aspects of a single phenomenon. The god was the site and the site was the god.⁹ A further distinguishing feature is the god Assur's lack of a family – he has no parents, no wife and no children, which makes him unique in the Mesopotamian pantheon. In later periods he was in fact associated with other divinities, but those speculations are clearly secondary and have their roots in political and ideological considerations. The goddess of the city Assur was known as Ishtar Assuritung, “the Ishtar of Assur”, but it is not clear to me how we are to understand this; most probably the epithet refers to the place, not to the god Assur. The importance of Ishtar Assuritung in the history of the city should perhaps be understood in light of the fact that the other large cities in the north, Nineveh and Arbela, both had goddesses as their main divinity: the Hurrian Shaushka, later equated with Ishtar, at Nineveh, and the oracular goddess known from later texts as Ishtar of Arbela.

The Old Assyrian temple to Ishtar, built by King Ilushuma, was constructed on top of a series of buildings, reaching back to the Early Dynastic period of the third millennium. The temple of the level called “E” was apparently erected during the Ur III period at the very end of the third millennium, and it was replaced by a much larger one, the so-called level D. The stratigraphy was incredibly complex in this area, and some of Andrae's interpretations were drastically revised by Bär in 2003.¹⁰ Andrae was not impressed by the building in this phase, pointing out that it was poorly constructed with walls that did not meet at right angles, but as noted by Bär this was, in fact, the largest Ishtar temple ever built at Assur, and it had a very long life, lasting into the Middle Assyrian period. The temple itself appears to have consisted of only one very large room, 34 by 8 metres. The preservation was so poor, however, that nothing can be said about the way the cult was organised here.

Very few finds can be associated with the building, but we do have a triangular bronze plate with an inscription that links it to this period. It carries a private votive inscription:

When Sargon was the steward of Assur, Haditum, wife of Belum-nada, dedicated this to Ishtar of Assur, her lady. She brought in the *urum* for the life of her husband, her own life and the life of her children.¹¹

The temple to the god Assur was located at the tip of the rock overhanging the river, most probably the very rock that was Assur. A remarkable seal from the Old Assyrian period that had been attached to a shipment of some sort, and which was found in a palatial context at the site Acemhöyük in central Anatolia, carries an inscription indicating that this was the seal of the god Assur. It shows a peculiar figure which is presumably meant to depict the god himself: it is a rock standing on four legs and with a bull's head projecting from its middle.¹² A cult relief which perhaps also dates from the Old Assyrian period and which was discovered in a well where it had been thrown, presumably when the city was sacked in 614 BC, shows Assur as a mountain god; this again points to the god's close relationship with the rock on which his temple stood.¹³

The original Assur temple was, according to traditions encapsulated in a royal inscription from the late thirteenth century, said to have been originally built by a certain Ushpiya, about whom nothing further is known. We cannot even offer a reasonable guess about his date, but it has recently been established that the first Assur temple was also from the late Early Dynastic period.¹⁴ Both the temple to Ishtar and the Assur temple appear to have been destroyed by fire shortly before 2000 BC.

The very earliest architectural remains found underneath the later temple to Assur, called simply "prehistoric" by Andrae, were probably part of a sacred building, but we cannot say anything definite about it. Underneath the later cella he found a buried treasure consisting of a number of copper and bronze objects, probably votive figurines,¹⁵ and those can be dated to the late third millennium (between 2300 and 2000 BC). They do not tell us a great deal about the beginning of the Assur temple. It cannot be ruled out that the rock itself was a sanctuary with only scanty architecture during its earliest centuries; the excavations found firepits here dug into the rock, perhaps hinting at rituals being performed on this spot before a proper temple was built.

Andrae had a hard time excavating the Assur temple, and not only because of the massive Neo-Assyrian remains on top, for the dig was hindered by the existence of a ruined nineteenth-century Ottoman garrison building erected over the remains of the temple (Figure 19). That is probably one reason the results of Andrae's exertions were so unsatisfactory with respect to unravelling the earliest history of the temple. He had to dig within the confines of the courtyard of the later structure, which unfortunately could not be removed. In fact, it is still there, now restored and used as a local site museum.

Ushpiya's temple remains unknown, and the first real building found by Andrae was securely dated to the Old Assyrian period. It was a massive and



19. The Ottoman building sitting on top of the ruins of the Assur temple, seen from the summit of the ziggurat. Photo MTL.

substantial edifice judging from the fragments of walls recovered, but a plan cannot be established. Inscriptions found *in situ* inform us that it was built by the Old Assyrian king Erishum I. In a text found in a private house in Kanesh, Erishum tells us that the name of the temple was “Wild Bull”; its main door was called “Guardian Angel”, the name of the lock was “Be Strong!” and the name of the threshold was “Be Alert!” He gives no other details about the building, saying only that he built the entire complex of the Assur temple, the Stepgate, a huge mud brick installation behind the temple, leading down to the river 20 metres below, the courtyard and the cella for the god (Figure 20). We also hear of the erection of two large beer vats called “The Twins” which were placed flanking a major doorway and associated with two duck figures, each weighing 30 kilos, and two moons covered with bronze. None of these building elements or objects were found.¹⁶

A later king of Assur, the conqueror and usurper Shamshi-Adad I, tore down Erishum’s temple and built a massive new sanctuary on top of the ruins, and that building could be completely recovered by Andrae. I shall return to this man and his temple later in this chapter.

Andrae found several palatial buildings from later periods, but he discovered no ruins of an Old Assyrian palace. That is in harmony with the evidence from Kültepe, for a royal palace is never directly referred to in the



20. The ravaged face of the Stepgate seen from the riverbank. The ziggurat is on top. Photo MTL.

texts. Obviously, the king must have lived in a large house somewhere in the city, but it appears to have been simply his house, not a central governmental or administrative building.

Under the floors of the later palace erected in the northern sector, Andrae discovered what may have been the remains of an early administrative building that can be dated to the Old Assyrian period. We know from the texts from Kanesh that the main bureau in the city, where, for example, taxes were paid, was known as the City Hall (*bēt ālim*) or the Office of the Eponym (*bēt limmin*), and it has been suggested that the structure under the later palace, the so-called Schotterhofbau (the building with a courtyard paved with pebbles), could have been the City Hall. However, very little was uncovered there.¹⁷ All in all, the excavations therefore contribute very little to a plausible reconstruction of life in Assur during the period of the commercial colonies in Anatolia.

The texts that are available to us from the city itself do not contain much reliable information about the early history either. It seems clear, however, that it was always a kind of border town, between the steppe to the west and the rich agricultural lands east of the Tigris, and between north and south. Although Assur came to give its name to the country called Assyria (Assur-land) and was its religious capital, it was in fact located at the extreme

southern end of the Assyrian heartland. During the earliest phases of its history, it seems to have been closely connected with the civilisation that developed in the south on the great Mesopotamian plain – perhaps to a greater degree than the other urban centres in the north. The main cities here were Nineveh on the Tigris, ca. 100 kilometres north of Assur, and the city known throughout its long history as Urbillum, Arbela and now Erbil, the present-day capital of the Kurdish region in Iraq. How and why it was Assur that came to dominate the north politically and culturally is not known and is in fact a little mysterious.

As already mentioned, the connection with the south is visible in the cultic implements found in the early temple to Ishtar from the Early Dynastic period, and the small treasure from the Assur temple points in the same direction. We know that Assur was under the direct political authority of rulers from the south during the Akkadian period (ca. 2350–2200 BC) and the Ur III period (ca. 2100–2000 BC). When the empire centred on the city Ur in the extreme south of the alluvial plain crumbled around 2025 BC, it seems likely that Assur as one of the distant provincial cities was able to free itself, and this is where the history of the city becomes dimly visible.

That history must be reconstructed on the basis of a few sources, some of which are of somewhat questionable validity. In copies from the first millennium we have a text that purports to provide us with an unbroken list of the kings of Assur and later Assyria, but with respect to the very earliest period it has serious flaws. It can in some cases be connected with original inscriptions that name the builders of various temples and structures in Assur, but not all of the rulers who have left such texts appear in the list of kings. We also have references in later, sometimes much later, inscriptions in which a king alludes to a previous constructor of the building he himself is restoring or rebuilding. In such instances we may assume that the information was based on the discovery of earlier inscriptions.¹⁸ A case in point is the reference to Ushpiya as the first king to build a temple for Assur, and a text from ca. 1400 BC tells us that the first king to construct fortifications around the city was a certain Kikkiya. Both of these names do in fact appear in the king list, but nothing is known about either of them.

Assur was in intimate ways connected to the Ur III Empire, which had its centre in the south of Mesopotamia but which was involved in military campaigns in the north, especially against Urbillum, the later Arbela. We cannot say which name in the Assyrian king list represents the first independent ruler of Assur after the collapse of the Ur III Empire in the northern region, but it is probable that the section beginning with the name Sulili,

king number 27 in the list, marks a significant break in the history of the city, probably the independence from Ur. The list continues as follows:

- (27) Sulili
 - (28) Kikkiya
 - (29) Akiya
 - (30) Puzur-Assur I
 - (31) Shalim-ahum
 - (32) Ilushuma
- Total: 6 kings [who are found] on bricks, whose eponymies are unknown.
- (33) Erishum I, son of Ilushuma, who [instituted the eponymy]. He ruled as king for 40 years.
 - (34) Ikunum, son of Erishum I. He ruled as king for [15] years.
 - (35) Sargon I, son of Ikunum. He ruled as king for [40] years.
 - (36) Puzur-Assur II, son of Sargon I. He ruled as king for [8] years.
 - (37) Naram-Suen, son of Puzur-Assur II. He ruled as king for $[x + 4]$ years.
 - (38) Erishum II, son of Naram-Suen. He ruled as king for $[x]$ years.
 - (39) Shamshi-Adad I, son of Ilu-kabkabu. During the time of Naram-Suen he went to Kardunyash (= Babylonia). In the eponymy Ibni-Adad, Shamshi-Adad came up from Kardunyash. He seized the town Ekallate. He stayed in Ekallate for three years. In the eponymy Atamar-Ishtar, Shamshi-Adad came up from Ekallate. He removed Erishum (II), son of Naram-Suen, from the throne. He seized the throne. He ruled as king for 33 years.

This sequence of rulers in Assur covers a long stretch of time, from ca. 2025 to 1776 BC, the year of Shamshi-Adad's death, or 249 years. If the first king in this section, Sulili,¹⁹ represents the break with the authority of the Ur Empire, and Kikkiya marks the new independence with the construction of fortifications, it seems that the ruler Puzur-Assur I was the founder of the dynasty we call the Old Assyrian. He was recognised by the later kings in the line as their first ancestor, and his descendants were kings in Assur until the dynasty was removed by the usurper Shamshi-Adad I. The first version of the king list was constructed during the reign of this king in an attempt to integrate himself and his lineage into the traditions of the city, and the first twenty-six names in his list have really nothing to do with Assur. They represent the tribal ancestors and the direct family ancestors of Shamshi-Adad I.

One of the most remarkable features of the Old Assyrian dynastic tradition is the use of the royal names Sargon and Naram-Suen, for they reveal a deliberate desire to reach back to the great Akkadian kings who were the

first to have had these names. They ruled a vast empire from their capital city, Akkade, some four hundred years before their namesakes in Assur. Tales concerning Sargon preserved from later periods connect this ruler with a military campaign in central Anatolia, where he is supposed to have vanquished the king of Purushaddum. This connection with Anatolia, whose precise historical relevance we cannot evaluate now, although it seems highly dubious, may be an important element in the Old Assyrian interest in Sargon of Akkade and his successor Naram-Suen. It is illustrated in a dramatic way by the one literary text so far identified in a private archive in the lower town at Kanesh, a legend that tells the story of Sargon. It may very well have been composed during the reign of his later namesake.²⁰

The text itself does not directly mention military feats in Anatolia and contains no reference to Purushaddum, but Sargon refers to a series of humiliating punishments imposed on defeated foes, among them the men of Alashiya (Cyprus) whose heads he covered as if they were women, the men of Hattum whose scalps he shaved and the men of Lullubum (in the Zagros) and Hahhum whose clothes he slit open. There are clear memories in the composition to legends from especially the Ur III period, but these punishments appear to have been invented by the Old Assyrian author.

Dercksen sees the text as connected to an ancestral cult that would have provided a powerful link between the Old Assyrian dynasty and the rulers of Akkade. That such ideas were alive in Assur is certainly quite possible, but as will appear from the discussion of the royal family's position in the governmental structure of Old Assyrian Assur, there were very real differences between the Akkadian rulers and the kings of Assur. It remains possible that a change in royal ideology and power happened at the end of the Old Assyrian period, but we lack any direct evidence for such developments.

At the start of the reign of King Erishum I, the peculiar Assyrian dating system normally referred to as the eponymate was introduced in the city. This meant that the years from now on were named after a high official in the city's administration, the *limmum*, who served for one year. We have a few lists of the eponymies throughout the Old Assyrian period, and one of them mentions also the kings and gives the dates of their reigns. This is why we can provide the figures for the lengths of the reigns of the Old Assyrian kings from the beginning of Erishum I's reign until roughly the end of the Old Assyrian period. The most elaborate version of this eponym list, the one that also gives the names and reigns of the kings, ends during the reign of Naram-Suen and shows that he ruled for at least twenty-six years. Since the king list shows that his reign lasted $x + 4$ years, we must conclude that he

was on the throne for at least thirty-four years, perhaps forty-four or even fifty-four. How long his son and successor was allowed to reign before he was removed by Shamshi-Adad I is not clear.²¹ Complex calculations involving figures mentioned in texts a thousand years later lead us to suggest the following chronological scheme:

Puzur-Assur I	?
Shalim-ahum	?
Ilushuma	?–1973
Erishum I	1972–1933
Ikunum	1932–1918
Sargon I	1917–1878
Puzur-Assur II	1877–1870
Naram-Suen	1869–1827
Erishum II	1826–1809
Shamshi-Adad I	1808–1776 ²²

★ ★ ★

WHAT DID THESE KINGS DO? WHAT HAPPENED DURING ALL THESE YEARS? The royal inscriptions from Assur tell us next to nothing, and the thousands of texts from the private archives in Kanesh are simply not interested in politics or history, so we have no evidence that can throw light on the events during this long period. The inscriptions referring to the kings' building projects are mostly brief and uninformative, although they do allow us to enumerate the main construction activities:

Ilushuma built the temple for Ishtar and began work on the walls;
 his successor Erishum I continued the construction of fortifications, built
 a temple for Assur and began work on a temple for the storm god Adad;
 his successor Ikunum concluded the Adad temple and worked on the walls;
 Sargon I was also active with the Ishtar temple and the walls,
 and his son and successor Puzur-Assur II concluded the construction of
 the walls.

All these projects indicate a furious building activity by the new dynasty, and the repeated construction of fortifications shows both that the newly independent city needed to be able to protect itself and that it was expanding rapidly. It seems that the building boom was not restricted to the public sphere, but that the residential areas grew, and this necessitated an enlargement of the urban area and the extension of the fortifications. Already Ilushuma explains in his building inscriptions that he “constructed a new

wall and distributed building lots to my city”,²³ and Erishum I mentions the clearing of land in connection with the building of walls, but despite the reference to named city gates it is unfortunately not possible to say where Erishum’s activities were located.

Presumably as a result of the crowded conditions, private buildings in the city were very expensive indeed, as we deduce from a few references in letters from Kanesh. In one case a house which appears to have covered three lots was sold for no less than 16 pounds of silver, but otherwise we find that houses cost between 2 and 6½ pounds of silver.²⁴ In the absence of excavated houses from the period, it is difficult to form a clear picture of the residential areas of the city, but it seems that the great merchant families had large establishments, houses with storage facilities, stables and living quarters. We know that these were places with a lot of activity, where caravans arrived from Anatolia while others were being sent off and where deals involving large quantities of tin, textiles and donkeys were struck.

Whereas Assur’s role in the international political system of the time is completely obscure, its position in the international trade is abundantly clear, as can be seen in the archives found in the private houses at Kültepe. The best information coming from the city of Assur itself is contained in two royal inscriptions that provide tantalising glimpses of at least part of the background of Assur’s special position in international commerce at the time, since they refer to economic measures taken to attract merchants and their goods to the market in the city.

Under Ilushuma, Assur established its place in the wider regional commercial network by giving special privileges to merchants from Babylonia. The text says that the king established freedom from taxation for the Akkadians – that is, the people living in the northern part of the alluvial plain – and it enumerates three main routes that would lead them to Assur: the first one runs from the edge of the Persian Gulf via Ur and Nippur – that is, connecting up with the commercial system that we know operated over the Gulf to Bahrain and Oman, bringing copper to the cities in Babylonia through the port at Ur.²⁵ The second route mentions two cities in the Diyala plain, Awal and Kismar, and it seems logical, therefore, to assume that the connections to Iran via the later famous Great Khorasan Road were being referred to. And the last route goes via the city Der in the area east of the Tigris, the gateway to the other important road to and across Iran which was associated with the city Susa in Khuzestan.²⁶

The men in Assur clearly knew how the commercial system of the time operated and which connections should be developed. It is likely that the measure described in Ilushuma’s text laid the foundation for the later rapid

growth of Assur's role in the international system, presumably building on existing contacts which were developed and exploited.

A text from the reign of Erishum I, the following king in Assur, indicates that these measures were further expanded. We now hear that freedom from taxation was established on "silver, gold, copper, tin, barley, wool, (everything) down to *eta*, bran and chaff."²⁷ This was then the basis for Assur's position as a major transit centre, where merchants from the south arrived to sell tin and textiles on the market, commodities which were afterwards exported from Assur to their colonies in Anatolia. This was the system that sustained the commercial presence abroad, and it will form the backbone for the further description of the economic, social and political structures of the Old Assyrian period. Unexplained is the fact that textiles are not mentioned in the royal inscription.

The economic and political rationality that must lie behind these policies should not surprise anyone. The daily practices that can be reconstructed on the basis of the private archives are founded on economic priorities rooted in rational and logical considerations. Caravans roamed over the entire Near East in a complex pattern of commercial circuits, and everywhere the motivation on the part of the traders was the pursuit of profit. The Old Assyrian network connecting Assur with Anatolia and parts of northern Syria can be understood as only one link in a much wider and much more extensive network, and the decisions referred to in the two royal inscriptions mentioned laid the ground for the immensely successful merchant activities reflected in the texts from Kültepe by placing Assur firmly in a position as a vital transit centre. It should also be kept in mind that Assur was far from the only such commercial hub at the time. We know of the existence of others, such as Sippar in the north-western end of the alluvium, directly placed as the gateway to the important route along the river Euphrates. Farther along this road, in what is now Syria, another such commercial centre was located at ancient Emar, and in the Levant itself we have the city Ebla, which played a powerful role in the trade, also centred on Anatolia, where the merchants from Ebla must have competed directly with those from Assur.

The wider network with which Assur was linked reached the large cities on the Babylonian plain, all the way over the Persian Gulf to Bahrain and deep onto the Iranian plateau, most probably all the way to ancient tin mines in Afghanistan and beyond. The traders from Assur concentrated their efforts on the Anatolian markets, however, and only a few Assyrians are known to have visited and perhaps stayed for long periods in the cities of northern Babylonia, notably at Sippar.²⁸ The supply routes to Assur for the larger number of textiles and all the tin were exploited by traders from the south.

At some point during the reign of Erishum II, the Old Assyrian dynasty ended with the usurpation of Shamshi-Adad I, as recounted in the note about him in the Assyrian king list. He ruled for thirty-three years during the later part of the Old Assyrian period, corresponding to part of level 1b at Kültepe. He was an Amorite king or tribal chieftain whose real capital was Shubat-Enlil in the Habur region in present-day Syria, and he rose to power at a time when dynasties of Amorite descent were installed in several city-states and kingdoms throughout Mesopotamia. He conquered the regions east of the Tigris and eventually the entire north, including Assur and the major city Nineveh, and proceeded to create a short-lived territorial state that controlled a vast region in northern Syria and Mesopotamia. Assur was just one of several cities in this kingdom, although it did have a special status since the dating system based on annual officials, the *limmu* or eponyms, in Assur was used throughout Shamshi-Adad's state.

He does not appear to have taken a great deal of interest in the trade, although he probably benefitted from it economically, but even though he did not reside in Assur he did have a major impact on the city. He raised two mighty religious buildings there, and both are in a somewhat ambiguous way related to what appears to have been a major religious reform. He was the first to erect a ziggurat in Assur, the colossal temple tower that still dominates the skyline, and it has been claimed that he dedicated it to the Babylonian god Enlil. This assumption goes back to Andrae, but there is in fact no hard evidence for it, and it is possible that the ziggurat was from the start dedicated to the god of the city, Assur. However, Enlil does appear in references to Shamshi-Adad's activities in the city, for when the king built a new temple for Assur, his inscriptions concerning this project surprisingly link the new sanctuary with Enlil as well:

The temple for Enlil which Erishum son of Ilushuma had built had become dilapidated and I abandoned it. In the midst of my city Assur I constructed the temple of divine Enlil, my lord, the fearful dais, the large chapel, the abode of the god Enlil, my lord, which was solidly constructed with the skilled workmanship of the builders. I roofed the temple with cedar beams. In the chapels I installed cedar doors with silver and gold stars... I constructed the temple of divine Enlil, my lord, and called it Eamkurkurra, "The temple which is The Wild Bull of the Lands", the temple of divine Enlil, my lord, within my city Assur.²⁹

This text was found inscribed on stone tablets, most of which were discovered in the ruins of the Assur temple, so it is obviously this building that is

being referred to as the temple for Enlil. Within the same temple Andrae also found numerous stamped bricks which stated simply that Shamshi-Adad was the builder of the temple for Assur.³⁰

The most radical interpretation of this puzzling state of affairs would be that Shamshi-Adad tried to fuse the two divinities, equating Assur with the Babylonian god. Enlil was in fact the head of the Sumerian and Babylonian pantheon, and his cult based on the city Nippur played a central role in the religious life of all the cities in the south. Equating the two gods would secure Assur a dominating position in Mesopotamian religion, not just in his city. However, the less drastic interpretation seems more probable, namely that Shamshi-Adad was intent on introducing the Babylonian god into the cultic world of Assur, where he was placed on an equal footing with the ancient god of the city. This may receive some support from a suggestion made by Miglus³¹ that Shamshi-Adad's version of the Assur temple was in fact a double one with two cellas, one for each of the two gods.

On the other hand, the erection of the colossal ziggurat was a massive undertaking, and the tower must have dominated the town, not unlike the large Gothic cathedrals in towns like Cologne and Rheims, places that were probably about the same size as ancient Assur. If it was really dedicated to Enlil, nobody could be in any doubt that this Babylonian god had made his entrance into the city.

What was behind these ideas in terms of personal religious preferences cannot be ascertained now, but it is clear that Shamshi-Adad did have a special relationship to the god Enlil.³² A sign of this is the name he gave to his own capital city, Shubat-Enlil, "Enlil's Abode".

Shamshi-Adad constructed a kind of empire that controlled large areas in northern Syria and Iraq, including the city Mari on the Euphrates, but it was not a stable political structure, and it collapsed rapidly after his death. His son and further successors became known simply as kings of Assur. The dynasty continued to rule the city for a couple of generations, but was eventually thrown out. A curious inscription from Assur left by a king Puzur-Suen (about whom nothing is known and who does not appear in the Assyrian king list) tells us that Shamshi-Adad's grandson, a certain Asinum, was removed in a revolt that was meant to restore the traditions of the Old Assyrian period. The Amorite kings are said to be "a foreign plague, not of the flesh of the city Assur", and Shamshi-Adad is accused of having destroyed the shrines of the city and built a palace for himself. This could be a reference to the so-called Old Palace that was built next to the ziggurat. These were obviously reprehensible acts which overturned the ancient

religious and political traditions, and Puzur-Suen proudly announces that he has destroyed the palace and brought back the old order.³³

After those events darkness falls on Assur, and it is only after a couple of centuries that we are able to follow the life of the city, but that lies outside the scope of this book.

THE KING IN ASSUR

EVER SINCE THE CLASSICAL AUTHORS DESCRIBED THE CONFLICT between Greece and the Persian Empire in terms of a struggle between freedom and democracy, on one hand, and despotism and serfdom, on the other, ancient Near Eastern society has been seen as the classic paradigm of the Oriental despotic state. The king was the absolute centre of power, supported by an army and a strongly centralised bureaucratic elite, and there were no powerful forces in society, such as a hereditary nobility or a critical public, and no alternative authorities who could counterbalance the institution of kingship and curtail its complete control of social and political life. These notions have become part of a Eurocentric view of history, and it is a fact that they found support in some of the evidence that came from the ancient Near East. It was not just the despotic Persian emperors who stood as the contrasting image to the Greek democratic heroes. The Neo-Assyrian Empire of the first millennium BC, known from a wide variety of sources, stands as the prime example of such a state form, subjugating the entire Near East with a ferocity and cruelty that were enshrined in the accounts of the Hebrew Bible.

The British classicist Moses Finley in 1975 wrote in a book entitled *The Ancient Economy* that he could safely disregard the Near Eastern cultures under this title since they were so entirely different from Greece and Rome; it would make no sense to treat such disparate entities under one heading, and he exemplified these differences in the following words: “It is almost enough to point out that it is impossible to translate the word ‘freedom’, *eleutheria* in Greek, *libertas* in Latin, or ‘free man’, into any ancient Near Eastern language, including Hebrew, or into any Far Eastern language either, for that matter.”¹

Apart from the fact that Finley’s claim is incorrect, his statement stands as an important contemporary echo of the classic European view. In 1910 the

British Conservative leader Lord Balfour in a speech in Parliament explained the British policy in Egypt at the time with the following words:

Western nations as soon as they emerge into history show the beginnings of those capacities for self-government, not always associated, I grant, with all the virtues or all the merits, but still having merits of their own. Nations of the West have shown those virtues from their beginning, from the very tribal origin of which we have first knowledge. You may look through the whole history of the Orientals in what is called, broadly speaking, the East, and you never find traces of self-government. All their great centuries – and they have been very great – have been passed under despotisms, under absolute government. All their great contributions to civilisation – and they have been great – have been made under that form of government. Conqueror has succeeded conqueror; one domination has followed another; but never in all the revolutions of fate and fortune have you seen one of those nations of its own motion establish what we, from a Western point of view, call self-government.²

Taken at face value the evidence left to us from the past is easy to interpret in such a way that it reaffirms and strengthens this traditional view. It is not really surprising that the history of Mesopotamia is usually told in terms of the activities of the kings, for the ubiquitous so-called historical texts, the royal inscriptions which were associated with major building exploits, all too easily seduce the historian into producing such a narrative. These royal accounts seemed to be the raw material out of which a political history of the ancient Near East could be written. The late Assyrian versions, referred to in the scholarly literature as “annals”, offer an ordered, chronological narrative focussing on the exploits of the king: “In the first year of my reign I conquered such and such and”³

Traditional archaeological preferences have tended to reinforce these views. Concentrating on official buildings such as palaces and temples, archaeologists have found the royal inscriptions that were used in foundation deposits commemorating the construction or repair of the building being excavated, and they discovered the administrative archives of central bureaucracies. The modest private buildings, where texts of other kinds might be found, have often been left alone.

The royal building inscriptions in their earliest form simply give the name, titles and genealogy of the royal builder and a brief mention of the construction project, which is the style represented by the Old Assyrian inscriptions from Assur referred to earlier, but the genre developed to include references to the ruler’s other achievements, usually wars and conquests. The emphasis is invariably on the king, who addresses the gods as the representative of his society.

In the ruined public buildings themselves, archaeologists were, moreover, likely to find texts which in different ways reflected the power of palace and temple. Since writing served the interests primarily of the powerful great institutions in almost all periods, our use of the written record of necessity results in a one-sided view of ancient society. The possible existence of another economic and social sector of society, one that was not in a direct way tied to palace and temple, therefore risks being completely overlooked. The reliance on the royal building inscriptions by modern scholars who wish to present a coherent “historical” narrative is not really satisfactory. It is understood by most scholars that these texts present a one-dimensional image of the ancient Mesopotamian society, even though it also has to be said that the political reality behind or beneath this ideological facade is often very difficult to grasp. It is fair to say that most scholars have accepted these texts as an adequate reflection of the social and political structures of ancient society, and there is no doubt that the royal texts do reflect central institutions and describe real events, but they have to be counterbalanced by other evidence, and there is a growing awareness in the discipline that the political structures are more complex and that they vary in character from one period to the next.⁴

Even though the Old Assyrian royal inscriptions never refer to wars or conquests, they could easily lead the historian to assume that we are dealing with a political situation that conforms well to the picture of traditional Mesopotamian society where the king is the central political, religious and judicial figure. However, precisely the existence of the extensive private archives from Kültepe gives us an opportunity to modify and correct this impression. Let us take as an example a text from the reign of King Erishum I (written on a door socket from an unidentified building) in which the king speaks about his building activities on the temple of Assur and on the walls of the city:

Erishum, steward of the god Assur, son of Ilushuma, also steward of the god Assur, built the temple, the entire temple complex for the god Assur, his lord, for the sake of his own life and for the life of his city.

When I started the work, the city obeyed my word, and I established freedom from taxes on silver, gold, copper, tin, barley, wool, (everything) down to *eta*, bran and chaff.

Every time I laid a course of bricks I mixed ghee and honey in every wall. My lord Assur stood by me and I cleared building lots between the Sheep Gate and the People Gate.

My father had constructed a wall, but I made the wall higher than my father had done, and he who does not respect my work but removes it, may the god Assur....⁵

Here we seem to have the words of a self-confident monarch, who can claim to have acted in a powerful and competent way in the execution of his duties towards the god and the community. He builds a temple in order to safeguard his own life as well as the life of his city, and he seems to stress that when he began his work the city accepted his command. It appears that he then granted tax exemption as a reward for the support of his people. In this give and take there is a strong element of reciprocity, however, and a later Assyrian king would hardly say that he had the support of his people, that would be self-evident or irrelevant, and expressing such an idea would seem to diminish the stature of the ruler.

In the case of the Old Assyrian text we are in a special situation that enables us to take a look behind the scene, so to speak, and place the king's words in a more complex context because we have a letter from Kanesh that deals with exactly such a situation mentioned in the king's inscription.⁶ This is a letter addressed to the Kanesh colony and sent by an authority called *nībum*, most probably a person or persons who represented the interests of the colonies in Assur. This fascinating letter runs as follows:

The City had imposed a payment of 10 pounds of silver on you for expenses for the fortifications, and they had already chosen a messenger to send, when we pleaded with the elders and said: "Do not send any messenger lest the colony incur an extra expense of at least 1 pound of silver!"

It is urgent! Take care to seal the 10 pounds of silver and send it as soon as possible, so that it will not be to us that the elders will turn with angry words! You must take care to write to the (other) colonies in accordance with the letter from the City and make them pay the money. Have every colony hear the letter from the king and let them pay. If you do not take care to send the money, we shall have to take it here out of your own funds.⁷

This letter introduces a number of actors who were clearly involved in the payment (and presumably the decision process) for the building project, giving us a glimpse of the background of the deliberations that led to the construction of the walls in Assur. The colonies in Anatolia are supposed to contribute a substantial amount of money as their share of the cost of the walls, and they are being ordered to do so by an authority referred to as "the City". In order to avoid the dispatch of an (expensive) official envoy with this order, the *nībum* then addressed the elders, a group that was therefore either part of or the same as "the City". A letter from this body was sent to Kanesh, a document referred to both as "a letter of the City" and "a letter of the king". These three authorities accordingly acted together and took decisions jointly in Assur: the City, the elders and the king.

I shall return to the question of the precise relationship between these three institutions. The letter strongly supports as a preliminary conclusion that the concept “the City” here must refer to an assembly which takes decisions in a variety of affairs; that the elders were most probably part of this assembly; and that the fact that the letter sent to Kanesh was written by the king indicates he was the main executive officer of the city assembly. Without drawing broad conclusions on the basis of these texts, I shall simply maintain that the bald statement in the royal inscription must be located in a considerably more complex context, where other institutions in the city played leading roles.



LET US LOOK FIRST AT THE KING, HIS TITLES AND HIS ROLE IN THE governmental apparatus of the city. Four different titles are in play: *iššiak Assur*, “steward of the god Assur”; *rubāum*, “prince, king”; *waklum*, “overseer”; and *bēlum*, “lord”. The first and third of these were used by the king himself; the two remaining ones were used by others to refer to the ruler. These four titles taken together contain a description of the role and function of the king in Assur.

The first title, “the steward of Assur”, clearly incorporates a reference to the king’s special relationship to the god of the city. He is not just *išši'akkum*, he is always “Assur’s *išši'akkum*”, and the title is found in very specific contexts, first of all in the building inscriptions. In contrast to the normal practice in royal inscriptions from Babylonia, we never find what became the traditional Mesopotamian royal title *šarrum*, Sumerian *lugal*, used by the kings in the early Assyrian inscriptions, for that term appears not to have been appropriate for a human, only for gods. The formulaic expression of the political and religious reality in the Old Assyrian world is found in the text on a seal on which we read: “Assur is king! NN is the steward of Assur.”⁸

This formula is in fact not unique to Assur but is known from contemporary royal seals found in the north Babylonian city Eshnunna, where it is said: “Divine Tishpak is the strong king, king of Warum! Azuzum is the steward of Eshnunna, his servant.”⁹ The main difference is, of course, that Eshnunna’s main god, Tishpak, was not, like Assur, identical with the city. The king Silulu son of Dakiki on whose seal the formula is first preserved was ruler in Assur before the installation of the Old Assyrian dynasty, but we find the same words in a long inscription from the reign of Erishum I. Here it occurs in an unfortunately badly broken passage which is concerned with the king’s role in the structure of the legal system in Assur.¹⁰

The title was ancient. It formed part of the political vocabulary of the Sumerian city-states of the Early Dynastic period in the third millennium, where rulers of the many small states made use of it to designate their dominion over a city. Although the title was clearly linked to the institution of the city-state, its precise meaning or significance is not well established. Thorkild Jacobsen, a prominent Sumerologist, has offered an interesting analysis of this early world, where men and gods inhabited the same physical space and where the cities were understood to be the *demesne* of a god, complete with the human inhabitants who were the god's servants or slaves. One man was appointed or chosen by the god to run the estate, so he was truly the god's steward, or *išši'akkum*.¹¹

From the late third millennium on, the title *šarrum* was used for human rulers in the south, and later it became the common term for a king also in the north. However, in Assur and later Assyria, the king long retained the *išši'ak Assur* formula, which placed a heavy emphasis on the role of the ruler as the deputy of the god. In the Middle Assyrian coronation ritual from the late second millennium, the main priest was to shout "Assur is king! Assur is king!" when the procession with the newly crowned ruler moved from the temple through the city. There is a clear echo of the Old Assyrian formula in this ritual.¹²

It would therefore appear that in terms of political institutions, Assur in the Old Assyrian period was a very conservative urban polity, with traditions harking back to the late Early Dynastic city-states of the third millennium BC. Central political and religious customs had survived, as is evident from the royal titulary, but a note of caution is in order. First of all we are in reality rather poorly informed about the political institutions in the early cities in the south, since most of our information comes from literary works. Secondly, although there are clear traces of very ancient ideas in the Old Assyrian political and religious system, we cannot simply assume that they retained the original meaning and significance. What we can be certain about is that the main title used by the king positioned him in a very special relationship with the god of the city.

When others referred to the king they made use of a different title, the word *rubāum*, derived from the root which means "big, great" and usually translated "prince" or "king". It is in fact the perfect Akkadian translation of the Sumerian term *lugal*, the word for king which really means "big man", but for unknown reasons the Sumerian word is always rendered in Akkadian as *šarrum*. The Old Assyrian word *rubāum* is mirrored by *šuhārum*, a word that designates a servant and is derived from the root meaning "small". One can say that these terms designate the two social extremes in Old Assyrian

society, and the concepts “big” and “small” appear in other contexts where rank and status are referred to.

It is not so easy to define the social and political significance of the Assyrian title. Building on the connection with rank and status, it is fair to assume that the man called *rubāum* was given this title in his capacity as the head of the royal lineage, the “prince”. It was used also for all other kings, including those in Anatolia, and the feminine form *rubātum* there designated a queen.

Part of the king’s area of activity as *rubāum* can be described on the basis of the texts from Kanesh. He was closely associated with *ālum*, “the City,” a word which in legal contexts designates the main legislative and judicial authority, the assembly of Assur. When the texts refer to these two institutions, they invariably place the City before the king, and this is significant since the sequence of names defines the relative rank of the persons or institutions referred to, a principle that can be deduced from the introductory passages in letters.

If you had to swear an oath in the context of a lawsuit, you did so “by the life of the City”, but in several instances we find an extended formula: “by the life of the City and of the king”. It is not clear whether the City here refers to the divine city, the community or perhaps even the assembly, and we may simply conclude that the king appears together with and on the same level as the City as authorities who have the power to punish perjury.

The title *bēlum*, “lord”, was used in very special circumstances. In judicial documents describing procedures before the colonial assembly in Kanesh, a litigant would sometimes ask that his case be transferred to the high court in Assur, the city assembly, and such a request would be phrased as follows: “Let the case be put before the City and my lord.”

The “letters from the king”, which will be discussed later, indicate that he was supposed to see to it that the decisions taken by the assembly were carried out. He was therefore surely himself a member of the assembly, presumably presiding over its meetings. His close involvement in the judicial procedures is illustrated by a passage in a private letter from Kanesh.

This was sent by a group of persons in Assur, men who represented the interests of the prominent merchant Shalim-Assur in Kanesh, and they inform him of the developments in a complex legal case. The writers explain that they have “gone in to the king” in order to ask for his expert advice, and they then proceed to quote the words he gave in answer to them. The whole affair was obviously extremely complex, and the king’s advice concerns the correct judicial procedure to be followed in their dealings with the assembly. What is significant is that the king was approached as a kind of constitutional

expert who could give citizens advice about the proper timing of their intervention, and one assumes that this was impartial advice which did not involve his taking sides in the dispute.¹³

The close relationship between king and assembly is richly illuminated by the “letters from the City” sent to the Kanesh colony, and such letters were dispatched by the king using a new title: *waklum*, “the overseer”. This is the second title that the king uses for himself, but only in precisely defined contexts, namely as the writer of letters. Also *waklum* was an ancient title known from third-millennium documents, but it seems that it was never used as a royal title outside Assur and Assyria. Sumerian *ugula* (presumably a loan-word from Akkadian) is used to denote a foreman, an overseer, and the title accordingly refers to a position within a bureaucratic, administrative system. That is, in fact, somewhat fitting for the content of the designation in Old Assyrian society, where the king typically uses it in his role as a member of the governmental system, as the overseer of the assembly.¹⁴

I know of no fewer than twenty-seven letters, published and unpublished, written by the king as *waklum*. About half of these, fourteen letters, were addressed to the Kanesh colony, and they are meant to inform this body of a decision taken by the assembly in Assur which concerns persons in either Kanesh or one of the other Assyrian colonies in Anatolia. An example will show the nature of these texts:

From the *waklum* to the Kanesh colony:

The City has rendered a verdict in the sacred precinct, (stating that): as for the creditors of Shu-Kubum son of Assur-bel-awatim – each must prove his claim by way of his witnesses in accordance with the words on the law stela, and he can then take his money from his (i.e., the debtor’s) available funds.¹⁵

The background to this text is simple to reconstruct: a merchant called Shu-Kubum (a nephew of Shalim-Assur) has died and his estate is under liquidation, a fairly frequent situation that often came to involve highly complex legal manoeuvres. These would regularly become so convoluted that they had to be referred to the high court in Assur, the city assembly. We are told that this body has held a meeting in the temenos which is known to have been associated with the Assur temple close to the Stepgate, and a decision has been made. As the executive officer of the assembly, the king now communicates to the colony in Anatolia what has been decided, and the further activities in the matter will have to be dealt with by the assembly there.

Other official letters from the king as *waklum* are concerned with a variety of topics that must have been dealt with in debates in the assembly, and

they will be discussed in the next chapter. In some cases the king speaks directly as a person who can communicate orders on his own; in others he uses the first person plural (“we have heard ...”, “we have not designed a new rule ...”), and taken as a group these letters show the king as the executive officer who was responsible for the promulgation and implementation of the decisions taken by the city assembly .

The king also used the title *waklum* when he sent private letters, a fact that has created some confusion for scholars, who could not accept the idea that a king could appear in the mundane affairs mentioned in the letters. These doubts have been laid to rest, however, and we now have eight *waklum* letters which have a decidedly private character, sent to persons in Anatolia who were involved in commercial affairs that also interested the king. Three of these are concerned with a rather extraordinary business deal in which a certain Asqudum son of Abu-shalim, a person who is once referred to as a “palace-slave”, is being accused of directly fraudulent behaviour in his contact with the king. The aging king Sargon I had entrusted Asqudum with a substantial amount of goods, and he had brought these to Anatolia, where they were to be sold. However, he has failed to send back the proceeds from the sale; in fact, he has not even sent the king a letter to explain what was happening. Instead he has had his own son bring back no less than 40 pounds of silver to Assur, but without informing the king, and this son has bought a new shipment of tin outside the city and sent it back to Anatolia. The angry king now demands that Asqudum send him silver, “lest I shall write to have you discredited in the colony!”¹⁶

This letter had no effect, presumably because the sender, King Sargon, died and was succeeded by his son Puzur-Assur II, so Asqudum perhaps hoped that the affair would be forgotten, but the new king was determined not to let the matter die. He wrote a letter to a private merchant, Pushu-ken in Kanesh, a man who will be referred to many times in this book and who was one of the wealthiest and most influential men in the Assyrian community in Anatolia. At this time he had been active in Kanesh for more than twenty years and must have been a grand old man in the colony. The king clearly acknowledged his importance and addressed him with great respect: “If you are truly my father and if you love me”, he wrote.

The new king wanted Pushu-ken’s help in his conflict with Asqudum, and he asked him to confiscate at least a talent (60 pounds) of silver – “preferably more!” – on his own authority and send it to Assur. He continued:

Make me as glad as if you gave it to me as a present! I shall pray for you to Assur and my own god. Exert yourself as if it were your own money!¹⁷

Pushu-ken did act, but a new letter indicates that he had failed to satisfy the king's expectations and had raised only some 10 pounds of silver. King Puzur-Assur in a second letter reminded him that he had already received a formal letter which authorised him to seize the money from Asqudum:

You have my letter stating that you may seize (the silver) on your own authority in accordance with (the specifications of) my letter. The man has treated my father and me with contempt. Exert yourself and act to please me. He has caused the death of my two servants and carried off their money.¹⁸

These letters show the king in his role as a private person who takes part in the commercial adventure in Anatolia like all the Assyrian traders. It is remarkable that he has to rely on the help of private contacts rather than on the official governmental institutions in Anatolia, and his letters are phrased as polite requests rather than as direct commands and orders. On the basis of these texts, Garelli has concluded that the king of Assur should be understood as “une sorte de marchand magnifié, *primus inter pares*”.¹⁹ Although the texts from the archives at Kanesh contain many examples of very sharp business practices and outright fraud, the outrageous behaviour of Asqudum is exceptional and hardly indicative of a great deal of respect for the king.

Some recently published letters from the *waklum* strengthen the impression that he operated, at least occasionally, as a normal player in the trade. The merchant Usur-sha-Ishtar in Kanesh, who has left us the largest private archive so far known and who was clearly an important man,²⁰ corresponded with the king, receiving a couple of letters that mention shipments of two and three donkey-loads of tin and 150 textiles. These letters, moreover, show that royal princes, sons of Sargon I although not the crown prince, were entrusted with the transportation and handling of the king's shipments. These texts are entirely ordinary business letters which could have been written by any Assyrian merchant who was able to operate on a reasonable, though not a grand scale in the trade, making use of his family members as agents or transporters.²¹

One of the extraordinary facts about Assur is that there is no reference in the texts we possess to a royal palace. Obviously, the king had a grand house somewhere which could be referred to by this term, and as noted Asqudum was referred to as a “palace slave”, but its absence from the texts tells us that the palace played a very small, possibly no role in the administrative and economic life of the city. As I shall discuss in a later chapter, these functions were tied to a quite different building, the bureau called either “City Hall” or the “Office of the Eponym”. This was where taxes

were paid and where a number of other economic and administrative activities were located, and it seems clear that the king had no special authority there.

The first impression to be had from the royal building inscriptions in Assur of the king as a powerful ruler, whose position should be compared with what is known about the kings in both contemporary Babylonian sources and in the later documentation from Assyria, clearly needs to be drastically revised. The king in Assur was part of a governmental structure which incorporated other, equally important elements. His position was first of all based on his special relationship with the god of the city, and it was held for life; moreover, it was bound to one family, the royal lineage, which means that his status was hereditary. These three features define the strength of the royal office, and it was on this foundation that kingship developed into something quite different in the course of the centuries following the Old Assyrian period.

It has proved somewhat difficult for many scholars in the discipline to integrate the Old Assyrian realities in the understanding of Assyrian kingship, obviously because of the perception that there is a strongly defined difference between the kings of the commercial city-state Assur and those who later ruled the kingdom and empire of Assyria. It has been claimed that “the genuine Assyrian culture only begins after the year 1500 BC,” which must lead to the apparently commonly held conviction that the Old Assyrian period can be disregarded as irrelevant to an understanding of the “real” Assyria that later developed.²² However, the drastic transformation of the royal office, its role and powers must be an integral part of any serious attempt to understand Assyrian history in the *longue durée*. It must also be maintained that the Old Assyrian political structure was not unique, and the new understanding of, for instance, the political system found in the Kingdom of Mari, where tribal affiliations and conflicts have been shown to be a central element of the king’s position during the reign of Zimri-Lim, should alert us to the existence of different paradigms for political power during the Middle Bronze Age in the Near East.²³

THE GOVERNMENT OF A CITY

THE CITY-STATE ASSUR WAS DOMINATED BY TRADE. THE RENAISSANCE saying *Genuensis ergo mercator*, “a man from Genoa, therefore a merchant”,¹ would make sense also for this ancient town, where a very considerable proportion of the male citizens must have been directly involved in commercial activities. In fact, in texts from Anatolia the designations *mera Assur*, “a son of Assur”, “an Assyrian” and *tamkārūm*, “merchant”, are interchangeable. As we have seen, even the king tried his best to be a success in the trade centred on Anatolia, involving his own family members in the activities. So it is a reasonable assumption that the government of the city was to a very large extent dominated by the rich and successful traders. Their avenue to power was the city assembly, the body that appears to have taken all important decisions in the city. In this respect Assur falls neatly into the same category as many commercial city-states known from other periods.²

The great lexicon of the Akkadian language, the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, completed in twenty-six large volumes in 2010, recognises that the word *ālum*, “city”, can refer to “the city as an acting (legal) person” and it gives a number of examples of such situations in texts from the Old Assyrian and Old Babylonian periods. However, there is no attempt to consider the practical implications of this. What actually took place when the City investigated a legal matter or rendered judgment? Who was involved? The translation “assembly” is accordingly never suggested. That forces us to ask, “Who was ‘the City’? Who took decisions?”

There was a special term for an assembly, *puhrum*, a nominal form of the verb that has the meaning “to gather, assemble”. However, that word is hardly ever used in Old Assyrian texts, where instead in the appropriate places we find the words *ālum*, “city”, and *kārum*, “colony”. It seems clear that these terms refer to assemblies which maintained the political and juridical system of the home city Assur and its colonies respectively.

The activities of the assembly are directly documented in the many letters from the City (sent by the king as *waklum*) and in hundreds of references in private letters: “I approached the City and obtained a letter from the City”; “the man is unreliable – in fact, he must not mention your name without reason to the City”; “the women of Assur-malik’s household approached the City and the City rendered a verdict”; “the City and my lord shall give a verdict for me.” Nearly all such examples simply refer to matters that were put before the City or decisions taken by this body, so at best they tell us about the function of the assembly. However, despite the richness of the documentation, we are very poorly informed about its composition or the rules that regulated the way it worked and reached decisions.

Private individuals were clearly entitled to speak in the assembly and present their grievances. They could approach the assembly, and when wishing to denounce or accuse someone they appear to have had free access to a debate. This would sometimes set men in the home city against traders who spent most of their time in distant Anatolia. One such individual, the important merchant Shalim-Assur in Kanesh, was involved in a very complex lawsuit with a nephew of his, a case that meant he had to come to Assur to present his side of the argument to the City, and in a letter from his representatives in Assur we hear that they are unhappy with him because he appears not to take the matter seriously:

You do not consider your losses. You do not seek your god’s face. Urgent, as soon as you have heard this letter, secure your tablets and your witnesses, set out and come here! In the sacred precinct you have been accused five times, so are you not ashamed? How long are you going to wait?³

It is clear that the elders, presumably the heads of the leading lineages of the city, played a central role and took decisions in the context of the assembly. However, whether the terse terminology in a phrase like “the City has rendered a verdict” should be understood to refer to a plenary assembly (all adult males) or to a much smaller group such as the elders cannot be decided on the basis of the evidence currently available. In support of the more restrictive interpretation we have a mere handful of examples that inform us that the elders can be approached in the same way as the City and that they can issue verdicts.

Of particular interest is an unpublished dossier of documents relating to a man called Ali-ahum.⁴ Ali-ahum’s two representatives in Assur have informed him that they have approached the elders on his behalf, surely in the context of a meeting of the assembly, presenting his claim in silver against a group of persons who have been involved in a business venture

with him. They explain to the elders that the debtors refused to pay and that Ali-ahum – fearing the decision to be taken by the elders – then scraped together the money himself and sent it. The money has unfortunately been lost en route. They argue that the persons involved in the original business affair in Anatolia should be held responsible for the money.

But at that point “seven or eight men who had invested money” stood up in the assembly (using the rare term *puhrum*) and rejected the accusation, claiming that Ali-ahum had been paid in Anatolia and that he had subsequently excluded them from the affair, so that the transport back to Assur had been carried out entirely on his own responsibility. After these explanations we are told that the elders issued a verdict.

In this case at least, there is a clear distinction between the assembly and the elders. The people accused could address the elders in their capacity as members of the assembly, and the decision in the case was then taken by the elders. Whether this was the normal practice cannot be determined, but it is at least possible that verdicts issued by the City in fact referred to decisions taken by the elders. In contrast to the assemblies in the colonies in Anatolia, which are very often said to be plenary ones, consisting of “small and big”, the one in Assur is not further described. There is a single text which refers to a plenary assembly in Assur, *ālum šaḥer rabi*, “the city – small and big”, but this one, slightly dubious example stands alone compared with scores of such references to the plenary assembly in the various colonies in Anatolia. One wonders whether it is a mistake.⁵

If all free adult males could take part in the meetings of the assembly in Assur, no fewer than two thousand to three thousand men would have to be accommodated, but it seems unlikely that the daily business would be of interest to more than a few individuals with a direct stake in the affairs discussed. Even gatherings of a few hundred men would demand a considerable space. We know from several references that meetings were held in the sacred precinct, sometimes “behind the Assur temple”, and there is a clear association with the Stepgate, or *mušlālum*. This structure was associated with the dispensation of justice, according to both the Old Assyrian evidence and texts from later periods.

This is made particularly clear in a long inscription from the time of King Erishum I which was found in a copy in a house in the lower town at Kanesh. It mentions the names of the seven divine judges who sat in the Stepgate and refers to the judicial procedures that took place there:

“Justice”, “He Has Heard the Prayer”, “Get Out Criminal!”, “Extol Justice!”, “Help the Wronged!”, “His Speech Is Truthful” and “God Has Heard” – these are the seven judges in the Stepgate....

May justice prevail in my city! ...Assur is king! Erishum is Assur's steward!

Assur is a swamp that cannot be traversed, ground which cannot be trodden upon, canals which cannot be crossed!

He who tells a lie in the Stepgate, the demon of the ruins will possess his mouth and his behind, he will smash his head like a pot that breaks, he will snap like a broken reed and his water will flow from his mouth.

He who tells a lie in the Stepgate, his house will become a house of ruin.

He who stands up to give false testimony, may the [seven divine] judges who pass [judgment] in the [Stepgate give him] a verdict of perjury! May Assur and Adad and Bēlum, my own god, tear out [his seed!] May they not grant him a place [of rest!]

[He who ...] obeys me [. . .] to the Stepgate. [Let him secure] an attorney of the palace, [may they bring] forth the witnesses and the plaintiff, and let then the judges sit in judgment and give an honest verdict [in front] of Assur!

The text itself was probably set up in this space, perhaps on a stela but more probably as an inscription on the two big wall cones, *sikkātum*, which are mentioned in several texts referring to judgments issued by the assembly: "The City has given a verdict in the sacred precinct in front of the two big wall cones."⁶

The Stepgate was part of a gigantic construction known as the *mušlālum* that ran along most of the northern front of the city, overhanging the river below, and through the centuries it was repaired and added to so many times that it is impossible now to determine what it looked like in the Old Assyrian period; in fact, we do not know where exactly the important gate itself was located. The Middle Assyrian king Adad-narari I (ca. 1300 BC) tells us that he restored the Stepgate:

At that time the Stepgate of the temple of Assur, my lord, which is opposite the Gate of the Oath of the God of the Land and the Gate of the Judges, built some time ago, had become dilapidated, sagged, and shook.⁷

It seems clear that at the time of Adad-narari I there were at least two gates here, and the connection with the administration of justice was still clear. It has been suggested that in the late Middle Assyrian period legal cases were tried in a special gate building located close to the temple of the gods Anu and Adad⁸; the gate was dedicated to the god of justice, the sun god Shamash. A number of texts from the period, including probably the two main exemplars of the Middle Assyrian laws, were discovered here. However, texts of different types which are supposed to have belonged to the library of the Assur temple were found scattered in the area between the

Shamash Gate and the Assur temple, and it cannot be ruled out that they were originally stored in a spot that would correspond perfectly with the description “behind the Assur temple”.⁹ The Stepgate is poorly preserved right behind the Assur temple. There is, however, a place in the immediate vicinity that could hold large groups of people, the spot where the ziggurat now stands, a construction that was erected by Shamshi-Adad I after the main Old Assyrian period. In my opinion it is possible that the meeting-place of the city assembly in the Old Assyrian period was located here, but that idea is, of course, hard or impossible to put to the test.

Although there was clearly a religious aspect to the execution of justice, manifested in the presence of the seven divine judges and in the oath-taking ceremonies, the Assur temple appears to have played no role in the judicial or indeed the governmental system. As far as we can deduce from the titles used, the king was present as the ruler of the city, and he implemented the decisions of the assembly as the “overseer”, not as the “steward of the god Assur”.

The assembly is attested primarily as a judicial forum where complex legal cases were debated and decisions taken. The lawsuits we hear about in the texts from Kanesh concern men and women who lived in Anatolia, of course, and there are certain typical problems that took up a lot of time for the assembly. One of these arose following the death of a trader in Anatolia, for that often led to long and complex conflicts involving heirs, who would fight with each other and with individuals and families who had claims on the estate or owed money to the deceased merchant. In the case of an important merchant's death, it would normally be very complicated to establish the precise situation with respect to debts and assets, for the trader would have been involved in a multitude of relationships. He would have had debts outstanding from other merchants, usually arising from the sale of imported goods on credit; he might himself have had similar responsibilities towards others. He would almost certainly have been involved in long- or short-term partnerships, both as a debtor and as an investor, he would have owed money to people both in Anatolia and in Assur and he would have had financial obligations towards public institutions such as temples and City Hall in Assur. As if these complications were not enough, he would have left behind a number of documents, debt notes and contracts that were most probably scattered in many places in Anatolia, wherever he had a house or could deposit texts with partners and friends. There would have been no general accounting system with a central ledger in which debts and claims were recorded, and the lack of a proper system of bookkeeping would have left the heirs with a dizzying, complex task.¹⁰

Following an appeal to the assembly by the heirs or their representatives in Assur, it was common for the defendants to receive a letter from the City in which guidelines for the procedures to be followed in Anatolian courts were stipulated; and they would be given the right to hire a trustworthy individual who could go to Kanesh with this letter and take responsibility for clearing up the mess. This man, referred to by the word *rābiṣum*, usually translated “attorney”, would be authorised by the king but he was paid by the heirs. He was effectively an extension of the legal power of the assembly and the king. We do not really know who these persons were, but it seems a safe bet that they had some considerable experience in judicial matters and that they were regarded as reliable and strong individuals. The plaintiffs who had been granted permission to hire an attorney chose their man from among willing and available candidates, in one case from a group of “ten or twenty people”.¹¹ There would then be a negotiation concerning the pay for his services, usually paid with half in advance and the rest on completion of the case. The salaries known are not always large, sometimes less than a pound of silver, so it is a little surprising that in one instance a group of affiliated traders “begged” to be chosen.¹² In most instances the relationship between plaintiff and attorney appears to have been unproblematic, but there are situations where the perceived inaction or incompetence of the attorney led to conflicts. In one instance the heir, who was not entirely satisfied with the performance of the attorney, reminded him of his original instructions: “Do be a brother to me! Be careful and not negligent with respect to the terms in the letter from the City!”¹³

It seems from our evidence, which is, of course, skewed because all of our documents come from Anatolia, that such legal issues took up most of the time of the assembly in Assur, but it was not just a high court, for it dealt with other matters as well. The general rules that governed the way in which the trade was conducted and the relationship to other groups were formulated here, as we can see from one of the king’s letters to the Kanesh colony:

The letter with a verdict of the City dealing with gold that we sent to you, that letter is invalid. We have not stipulated any (new) rules concerning gold. The situation with respect to gold is as it used to be, namely that any colleague may sell to any other colleague. In accordance with the words of the stela no Assyrian at all may sell gold to an Akkadian, an Amorite or a Subarean. He who sells any will not live.¹⁴

Gold played a special, not entirely understood role, and it seems that it was hoarded in Assur. We also know that certain central procedures such as the joint-stock partnership were always formulated using the gold standard.

There was clearly an old rule forbidding Assyrian merchants to sell gold to non-Assyrians, one that had been briefly revoked and was now reinstated. We see here an example of the kind of commercial policies that were pursued by the government in Assur.

Another precious commodity, generally assumed to be meteoric iron, was the subject of decisions by the assembly. The old practice had been to levy the special tax on this in Assur, but since apparently the trade in iron in Anatolia had developed and grown, a letter from the City was sent to Kanesh, ordering that body to collect the tax from now on, presumably because the transactions in this commodity almost always took place in Anatolia. This then gave rise to a circular letter from the Kanesh colony to all colonies and trading stations informing them of the new measure but also stressing the absolute need to establish adequate bureaucratic procedures:

As soon as you have heard our letter (writes the Kanesh colony) – whoever has either sold it to a palace over there, or has offered it to palace officials, or still carries it with him without having sold it yet – write the exact amount of every piece of meteoric iron, the man's name and his father's name in a tablet and send it here with our messenger. Send a copy of our letter to every single colony and to all the trading stations. Even when somebody has sold meteoric iron through a commercial agent, register the name of that man!

We have a small dossier of letters that are concerned with this affair because of the lucky find of the archive of a certain Kuliya,¹⁵ who functioned as the special envoy of the Kanesh colony and who had copies of all the official correspondence in his house.

These examples show how the city assembly kept control of all aspects of the trade centred on Anatolia. A notorious case involved some prominent Assyrians in Kanesh who became too interested in certain types of Anatolian textiles, the so-called *pirikannum* and *saptinnum*, and began to conduct an extensive trade in such fabrics. By doing this they obviously established unwanted competition with the textiles exported from Assur. The city assembly duly intervened, fined a lot of merchants heavily (10 pounds of silver each) and forbade the trade in these textiles. The bosses and financiers in the home city clearly had the power and the will to protect their own interests, even from their compatriots in Anatolia, men who would in most cases be closely related to them anyway.¹⁶

In another situation the assembly issued an order to all caravans leaving for Anatolia that a third of the investment in any shipment be in tin. The letter in question which refers to this problem was written from representatives in

Assur to merchants in Kanesh; substantial sums of silver had been shipped to the capital in order to have this invested in caravans, but the men in Assur explain that the city assembly has ordered that one-third of the investment in a caravan be in tin, and at the moment there is no tin available on the market in the city. They therefore cannot send off a caravan but have to wait until new shipments of tin arrive from the south.¹⁷

These texts give us a clear example of a strict commercial policy being imposed by the assembly. One may assume that it was tempting for the traders to load their donkeys primarily with textiles, which would have been in conflict with the interest of the city government; the kingdoms in Anatolia were presumably more interested in the strategic commodity tin than in the luxury trade in textiles. Assur's relations with the cities in the south, the "Lower land", namely northern Babylonia, from which the tin came, would presumably also have deteriorated in a situation where there was no longer a brisk trade in tin in the city. When supplies of tin had stopped for some reason, an unfortunate situation arose where the traders in Assur could not get their caravans, already organised with quantities of textiles, sent off.

Another letter from the king to the plenary assembly of the Kanesh colony dealt in detail with a most unusual situation. The Anatolian city Wahshushana, where there was a very important Assyrian commercial settlement, had been sacked in a local war, and the Assyrian traders had fled. Now the authorities in Assur had heard that both local Anatolians and some Assyrian "small men" had looted the abandoned archives in the merchants' houses and that they were busy selling the tablets. That was possible with debt notes where the claim could be transferred in various ways and at any rate rested with the person who had the document in his hands. The Kanesh colony now received urgent and detailed instructions: the tablets were to be bought back, collected and made available to the original owners, who could then purchase their tablets from the authorities; compensation would have to be decided on the basis of a verdict by the City in each case.

My final example of interventions by the assembly comes from a mention in a private letter. A certain Puzur-Ishtar writes from Assur to his two brothers in Kanesh, addressing the letter also to his three representatives who will be witnesses to his message.

You must have heard from various sides that during the past three years the stocks of your father's household and our houses have been pawned for money. Since that was not enough (to cover his debts), also the house I myself had acquired and the household goods, both mine and those belonging to my wife, have been sold for silver to cover the debt of your

father. But you – instead of sending the silver you still owe, of assisting your father's house and thus saving the spirits of your ancestors – you do nothing but send me here reports about your fights!

Now Assur has taken pity on his city, so that when a man whose house has been sold can pay back half of the price – then he can enter his house again. Terms of three instalments have been set for the remainder. Since strangers stood ready to harm our paternal house, I entered the house of a moneylender and borrowed 5 pounds of silver, which I paid as the price of the house, and now we have moved into the house again. As for the payment of the new house, make every pound of silver you can raise available and send it to me. We shall then pay in full the price of the houses. Speak to my representatives to get their answer.¹⁸

There are occasional references, especially in women's letters, to hardship in Assur, and this text illustrates clearly how things could go badly even for an established family. The father, who has died, has left a mountain of debts, and in that situation the son in Assur has had to sell just about everything – even household items belonging to his own wife. And while he was busy doing that, his two brothers in Anatolia kept fighting with each other, probably in attempts to wriggle out of accepting responsibility for their father's obligations. In that situation there is suddenly a ray of hope because Assur has taken pity on his city (the god being credited with having ordered measures taken by the city assembly) and has introduced emergency laws to protect families in trouble. If they can raise just half of the price for which their paternal house had been sold, they are entitled to move back into it, and fairly easy terms are set for the repayment of the second half of the value of the house.

As I have suggested earlier, around the year 110 in the eponym sequence (1860 BC) a major crisis hit the Assyrian commercial society, precisely in connection with the death of several prominent merchants.¹⁹ The father, Hinnaya, whose death caused the trouble referred to in the letter, was surely one of those, and his sons were faced with a poisoned inheritance that had dire consequences for them.²⁰ Even though we cannot date this letter precisely, it seems very likely that it refers to a general crisis rather than one which concerned only this family. The city government would hardly have intervened if only one unlucky merchant had been involved.

It would have been wonderful if just some of the activities of the assembly had been illuminated by texts from Assur itself, but in the absence of excavated texts from the capital we are left with the evidence from Anatolia when trying to analyse the structure and function of the city assembly, and the examples do provide some information about the wide-ranging

activities of this body. The “verdicts” issued by the assembly in most instances dealt with legal matters, where it functioned as a high court, but it is equally clear that the assembly had the authority to regulate and control all aspects of the commercial and social life of the Old Assyrian society, in Assur as well as in Anatolia.

THE YEAR EPONYM

ACCORDING TO THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF MESOPOTAMIAN history, the “Great Organizations”, palace and temple, were the undisputed centres of the political, judicial and administrative structures in the kingdoms and empires attested throughout the millennia. It was in these institutions that the daily administration of the affairs of the realm was conducted, and the day-to-day running of these offices was in the hands of a bureaucracy that left a staggering number of administrative documents for us to study. Very clearly, even taking into account that we lack the administrative archives from Assur, the Old Assyrian situation was different. Neither palace nor temple appears in a central role in our documentation. The royal palace is practically never mentioned and it does not appear as an economic or administrative centre. Temples clearly did play a role in the economic life of the community, but apart from a few unrevealing references to the Great Treasury of Assur and the fairly common practice of dedicating amounts of money to the temples as *ikribu* payments, sums that were then active in the daily running of the merchant’s activities, their participation is almost entirely undocumented. However, if the alternative interpretation of the term *ikribu* as denoting temple investments given to individual traders is correct,¹ these institutions would appear to have played a relatively important role in the economy of Assur. At the same time, there is no indication that the temples had a significant role in the administrative life of the city. Instead, the administration of the city’s economy was run by a special institution, the year eponymy, the holder of which – the eponym – was in charge, for one year, of the main administrative bureau in Assur known as City Hall (*bēt ālim*) or the Office of the Eponym (*bēt limmin*).

The year eponymy stands as the counterpart to the assembly, which functioned as a high court and as a decision-making body, the highest political authority in the city, as well as to the king, who was the executive

officer of the assembly. These three institutions, in a complex and intricate balancing act, were in charge of the political, judicial and administrative life of the city.

The Assyrian eponymy is a unique institution in Mesopotamia, and the eponym list indicates that it was created at the beginning of the reign of Erishum I in 1970. It may very well, however, rest on much older foundations, but such traditions can no longer be traced. The eponymy existed until the very end of the Assyrian Empire in 612 BC, but it obviously changed character during these more than 1,300 years, being at the end an honour bestowed by the king on his highest imperial officials. Even in that form it must have retained a very high prestige. The excavators at Assur discovered two rows of monumental stelae located just outside the city walls; one row contained a stela for every eponym, whereas the other contained stelae for the kings (and some queens). We do not know when this monument was started, for repairs and rebuildings in the area led to the destruction of the earliest stelae, which means that the oldest preserved one is from the fourteenth century. Whether this impressive monument had been created in the Old Assyrian period is accordingly quite unclear, but its mere existence indicates the importance of the eponymy throughout Assyrian history. The erection of the annual stela must have been an event imbued with great significance, marking the beginning of a new year and presumably surrounded by solemn ritual.²

We do not know how the people of Assur dated their texts before the introduction of the *limmu* institution. In the south, in the cities and states of the Babylonian region, there was an ancient tradition of naming years after a major event, and this was practically always directly connected to the king. Years were named after a successful war, a major building project or perhaps a cultic event – but invariably these names referred to acts said to have been performed by the ruler. Whether such a practice was ever found in Assur is not known, but it is surely significant that the system introduced with the first eponym in 1970 BC was not based on any kind of royal prerogative. The newly introduced institution was in the hands of the aristocracy.

Serving for one year only, the holder of the eponymy could never build a personal career on his office. On the contrary, abuses committed during his term of office would almost certainly be sanctioned when he had to step down. Moreover, it seems probable that originally the individual eponyms were not elected or chosen in some fashion by king or assembly, but were appointed as the result of the drawing of lots. There is no clear Old Assyrian reference to such a practice, but from a much later period, the ninth century, a thousand years after the texts from Kanesh, we have an actual lot. This was

a cube of clay, about 3 centimetres in size, which was inscribed on four sides with the text:

Assur, great lord! Adad, great lord!

This is the lot of Yahalu, the chief steward of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, the governor of the city Kipshuni, the land Qumeni, the land Mehrani, the land Uqi and the Cedar Mountain, who is also chief of customs.

May Assyria's harvest prosper and be fine in his *limmun*, his lot!

May his lot be drawn before Assur and Adad!³

King Shalmaneser III himself had served as eponym in his first year of reign, which had become the normal practice at this time. And when in his thirty-first regnal year the king "cast his lot" for the second time, we may rest assured that the correct result would have been guaranteed, but even though the procedure itself, at least at times, was subverted, it seems likely that in less ideologically charged years the casting of lots would have been allowed to proceed without any manipulation. In later centuries the position of eponym came to rotate according to a fixed schedule among the highest royal officials.

None of the Old Assyrian kings held the post of eponym. However, a certain Ishme-Dagan son of Shamshi-Adad is known to have done exactly that.⁴ There is no doubt that this was either a king or a crown prince, and at first glance one would think of the son of the conqueror of Assur, the man who put an end to the Old Assyrian dynasty. However, since Ishme-Dagan does not appear in the Old Assyrian list of eponyms, we must be dealing with a later king of the same name, number 57 in the Assyrian king list, who would have ruled sometime in the sixteenth century. The first king known to have held the post during the time of his reign was Enlil-nirari, who ruled between 1329 and 1320 BC. Even a crown prince serving as eponym marked a serious break with the old traditions, however, and must be understood as a reflection of the growth of centralised kingship in Assyria.

The long list of names of eponyms that covers about 250 years, from the beginning of the reign of Erishum I to a period after the expulsion of the Shamshi-Adad dynasty from Assur, must tell us something important about the recruitment to this office. It is a reasonable assumption that the eponym was chosen from a limited group of persons, but the fact is that we simply do not know. Only a few of the names in the list belong to persons who are otherwise known from our textual documentation from Kanesh. That is, of course, precisely what should be expected if the position was restricted to the elite in Assur, for those men would rarely set foot in Anatolia.

Most names in the list are identified with a reference to their father's name, and a few are given either nicknames or professions. We find a skipper, a ghee trader and an armourer, a man from the town Nerabtum in the Diyala region and one said to be *hapirum*, a word that designates a fugitive or a mercenary soldier. It is impossible to say whether such labels refer to the actual social status of the individuals in question or whether they are nicknames that clung to them, perhaps long after they were relevant. There are clear indications that at least some of the holders of the eponymy belonged to the elite of Assur society: Elali (REL 91) was chief priest (*sangūm*), Iddin-Assur (REL 24) was a priest (*kumrum*) and Enna-Suen (REL 106) was the son of the priest of the moon god Suen.

Although few of the eponyms appear as active persons in the texts from Kanesh, we do find examples of men who spent years in Anatolia before they returned to Assur to take over the post of eponym. In some cases they had served in administrative posts in Kanesh, where a system of weekly officials was linked to the central Office of the Colony; these men, referred to by the term *hamuštum*, gave their names to the weeks in the Assyrian calendric system in Anatolia.

During the first years of Özgüç's excavations in the lower town at Kültepe, he found a house said to belong to a certain Buzutaya; it contained an archive (unpublished, and exact size unknown) and a very rich grave under the floor. This man served as week eponym at Kanesh during the years REL 89, 90, 94 and 96, and a few years later, in REL 102 (1871), he became year eponym in Assur. It seems likely that he had moved back to the home city after having spent many years as a merchant in Anatolia, but another trader who became year eponym in the following year, a certain Innaya son of Amuraya, can be seen to have gone back to Kanesh after his term as year eponym; he served as week eponym there at least three times during the following decade. Unfortunately his house was found by the local villagers and emptied before proper excavations started, so we have only rather unsatisfactory information about him, but he was clearly a wealthy and important member of the colonial society.⁵ As for Buzutaya's archive, we shall have to wait until it is published; it is not clearly defined in the literature, and all we can say about him is that he too was a rich merchant in Kanesh before he went back to Assur.

A handful of other year eponyms can be seen to have lived for a while in Anatolia before they were entrusted with the powerful office in Assur, so there was clearly a degree of social mobility, where individuals could progress from their existence as colonial merchants to become real big shots in Assur. This was not a very common situation, however, and it seems that

most of the men who were eligible for the post of year eponym were part of Assur's society. One man in particular, Silulu son of Uku, stands out. He was eponym in the year REL 99, and he is attested several times in Anatolia as a witness to affairs from REL 82 until around REL 90. But he also appears in a letter written by King Sargon I, who writes that he is bringing a small shipment of tin from him to Kanesh; he had a brother called Assur-dan, who functioned as the Assur representative of the important family of Shalim-Assur, and in one text he was described as an "envoy", indicating that he had at least a semi-official position.

All of this taken together indicates that the post of eponym in Assur was regularly held by men from the highest social circles in the city, presumably men who could be elders and who may be compared to the members of the Roman Senate. Our knowledge of the social system in the capital will not allow us to go further than that, and there are a few indications that men with a more modest position could also be asked to serve. The Old Assyrian eponym sequence shows that in a few cases the same person could serve more than once. Quqadum son of Buzu was eponym in REL 12 and 26 and Ennam-Assur son of Begaya was eponym in REL 19 and 37; moreover, his brother Menanum held the office in REL 29. Interestingly, a certain Sukkalliya son of Menanum was eponym in REL 80, fifty-one years after the first Menanum (probably his father, since this was an uncommon name) held the post. These few examples point to the existence of a circle of influential families whose members would be natural candidates for the office, but we need detailed prosopographical studies to broaden this understanding.

The term *limmum*, or perhaps *limum*, has no convincing etymology, although it may be related to a word of West Semitic origin that denotes a social group such as a clan or lineage and which is also the designation for a god attested in the texts from Mari on the middle Euphrates.⁶ The best indication of the meaning of the word in the Old Assyrian texts comes from a few documents from Kanesh which deal with business conducted by the Office of the Colony. They show how one, two, sometimes three individuals acting on behalf of the colony are referred to as *limmu*. This happens in situations where an acknowledgement had to be given for a deposit on an account in the Office of the Colony, when a loan was extended to the colony or when the colony handed over certain documents to a person for transportation; the terminology leaves no doubt about the role of the men designated as *limmu*: "On behalf of the colony (three named men) as *limmu* received the money," or "PN *limmum* entrusted the tin to PN2 on behalf of the colony."⁷

It is fair to assume that the word denotes the power to represent the community in concrete situations where the colony had to act as a legal person,

and there can be little doubt that the same conclusion can be drawn concerning the men who were *limmu* in the capital. As already mentioned, they were in charge of the office there, which corresponds to the Office of the Colony, referred to as either City Hall (*bēt ālim*) or Office of the Eponym (*bēt limmim*).

We do not know precisely where the building itself was located, but it must have been a quite large establishment. According to one interpretation it was probably a multi-storey house, and judging from the many different activities in the building it must have contained offices, storage facilities for a variety of goods, probably the main treasury of the city and perhaps shops.⁸

We have two seals from the Old Assyrian period that are said to belong to the City Hall. One, found impressed on a bulla in the palace archive at Acemhöyük, has the legend:

Belonging to divine Assur. Of the import tax of City Hall.⁹

The text on the bulla tells us that the seal had been used by the official called *nibum*, who has already been encountered as the person or institution who wrote a letter to the Kanesh colony in connection with the payment for fortifications at Assur. According to Dercksen, the *nibum* may have been responsible for levying an import tax that accrued to the city government, and the term could denote “the office or group of officials within the City Hall specifically concerned with financial matters”.

The second seal mentioning the City Hall was found impressed on the vassal treaties issued in 672 BC by King Esarhaddon, more than a millennium after the Old Assyrian period. It is in Old Babylonian style and has the legend:

Belonging to divine Assur; of the City Hall.¹⁰

When used by Esarhaddon, this seal was clearly an ancient artefact of great importance, and its use on the treaties gave these agreements a direct sanction from the god. It has not appeared on any Old Assyrian documents.

The eponyms had a staff to take care of the many activities that were centred on his office. In fact, there was more than one person who was referred to by the title *limmum*, since we hear of an “upper” and a “lower” *limmum*, a “silver *limmum*” and a “grain *limmum*”, and in some cases persons acting for the City Hall are referred to as *limmus* in the plural. These designations seem to indicate that the staff of the bureau had highly specialised areas of responsibility, and the reference to a *limmum* concerned with grain points to the City Hall as a place where agricultural products were stored and probably sold.

The second-most important official after the eponym himself appears to have been given the title *laputtā'um*, which should perhaps be translated as "lieutenant". We know the names of more than ten men who had this title, and in one, uncertain instance we may have both a father and his son in this role.¹¹ But the references to these men are uninformative about their duties and powers. The same can be said about the official called *mūši'um*, although the word itself points to a connection with the export tax levied by the City Hall, the *wašitum*, since both terms are derived from a verb with the meaning "to leave". It seems relatively clear that collecting this tax was at least part of the task of the *mūši'um*.¹² The last title known, *birum*, tells us nothing, however, and all we can say is that it referred to low-ranking officers in the City Hall who may have been attached to the central storehouse known as *mišittum*.

Although the evidence is rather scanty with respect to the concrete activities of the staff of the City Hall, it is obvious that the institution was a powerful one which "played a pivotal role in the economy of the city-state, for the export trade with Anatolia as well as for the local economy."¹³ Luxury commodities such as meteoric iron and lapis lazuli could be bought here, as could the most important export wares, tin and textiles. Merchants could even buy goods on credit, so that they became indebted to the eponym in charge, a feature to be discussed later. It seems likely that the City Hall managed both the granary and the central treasury, and there is evidence that metals were assayed and that the standard weights were kept here. Certain taxes were paid to City Hall, such as an export tax on caravans leaving for Anatolia and an import excise on the silver brought back.

City Hall must have been a busy place and one which figured prominently in the lives of the merchants of the city. There they bought goods and paid taxes, and many of them worked up a considerable debt obligation to the eponym, buying on credit and having payment of their taxes deferred. There is no indication, however, that individuals could borrow money, that is, silver, against interest at City Hall.

The power in the hands of the eponym and his staff was considerable. Several letters, especially some written by women to their menfolk in Anatolia, show that in case of non-compliance with the orders from City Hall to pay outstanding debts, houses could be impounded, slaves and slave girls could be taken as security and the women of the family could be given a very hard time, often reduced to tears. After the death in REL 104 of one of the most influential merchants in Kanesh, the well-known Pushu-ken, it seems that his estate was in trouble, and his daughter Ahaha in Assur got

into difficulties with the eponym. In a letter to her brothers in Kanesh she explains that she has scraped together the large amount of 26 pounds of silver to pay off debts to City Hall, but 2 pounds of silver for unpaid export tax, 8 pounds of silver which was a debt to the “lower eponym” and a further 2 pounds related to an investment remain outstanding. In another letter to the brothers she informs them that in effect their affairs have been frozen and no one may take or claim any debts; their house has been taken as a pledge, together with all the furniture. And in a letter to her father’s partner, a certain Puzur-Assur, she writes that two eponyms have treated her badly and taken her house as security for debts. She has turned in tears to her father’s official representatives in Assur, but they have refused to help, so now there is not a penny left for her. In a further letter to her brothers she writes: “The eponym is making me afraid and keeps taking my slave girls as security. Send some 10 pounds of silver and have your agents offer that to him to pay for the money that has been declared for me (as my debt).”¹⁴ This was how important, successful families were being treated by officials who seem to have been determined to show no mercy when it came to collecting debts. The threats were very real, for houses confiscated by the eponym were sometimes sold to others by City Hall.

It is in fact not at all surprising that the eponyms were so harsh when it came to their treatment of difficult debtors, for it seems certain that the individual holders of the office were personally responsible for the credit extended to debtors. In several cases we can see that debts were allowed to run for many years before being called in, for they were still referred to as debts to a previous eponym. On the occasion of the death of a debtor, his heirs would immediately be ordered to regulate the debts outstanding to the authorities in Assur, which was what happened after Pushu-ken’s death, and it was then the obligation of the previous eponym, during whose term of office the debt had been allowed, to see to it that the money was paid. Merchants in Anatolia who chose to forget about such obligations could create a nasty surprise for their heirs, and in the absence of sophisticated bookkeeping practices it could even be highly problematic to keep track of all the various debts and claims, so it seems that there was a clear tendency to simply concentrate on a healthy cash flow. That could hide and obscure an underlying worrying state of the finances of the family.

Clearly, during his term of office the eponym was in a position to favour men and families close to him by allowing debts to accumulate, and that alone gave eponyms considerable influence. On the other hand, they had to be reasonably certain that they were not supporting unsafe merchants, for then they would in the end stand as the ones responsible for the debt.

This danger was to some extent diminished by the common practice of demanding guarantors for debts to City Hall.



THE YEAR EPONYMY WAS A VITAL ELEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENTAL SETUP in Assur. A remarkably elegant system had been constructed, where the religious authority, the judicial power and the administration of the economic life of the city, embodied in different institutions, functioned in a complex balancing act. There were surely close links between them – the king was part of the city assembly, the leading members of this body could serve as eponyms and there were most probably ties that bound the Office of the Eponym to the temples, but each element nevertheless had real autonomy and operated independently of the others.

The eponymy is the oldest attested example of an institution that is known from other societies, ancient Greece and Rome to mention the classic cases. The Athenian eponymy shows the clearest similarities, but a direct link between Assur and Athens can hardly be argued. When the Assyrians and the Greeks came into contact with each other during the first millennium BC, the eponymy in Assur had changed character and no longer served as an office independent of royal power.

Part III

Anatolia



THE ANATOLIANS AND THEIR LAND

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE VISITING ASSYRIANS AND THE LOCAL populations of Anatolia was not just a matter of commercial and political dealings; it touched upon the most intimate sphere of private lives. Yet the texts provide us with only very limited material for an understanding of Anatolian society or culture, for even though some Assyrians must surely have taken a keen interest in the new world in which they found themselves, there was little incentive or justification to write about it. We do have a couple of archives from houses inhabited by Anatolian families, but they are unfortunately almost entirely unpublished.

The land itself – a high plateau, cold and harsh in winter with snow on the hills and mountains – was very different from the Assyrian home. Even though we have pitifully little information about the physical world of the time, we may assume that the rolling plateau, now almost entirely denuded of trees, would have been partly wooded, probably offering extended open forests of predominantly oak. Even many of the flowers would have been new and different to an Assyrian.

Anatolia is a land of contrasts. Through the high passes of the Taurus in the south, the roads lead north to a region of rolling hills and broad plains bounded by low mountains, which is the central Anatolian plateau (Figure 21). Farther north towards the Black Sea one enters a zone of much rougher contrasts; the popular book by C. W. Ceram, known in English translation as *Secret of the Hittites*, had the dramatic, but entirely appropriate title *Enge Schlucht und schwarzer Berg* in German, *Narrow Gorge and Black Mountain*, which gives a good impression of the land of the Hittites. The northern mountain chain runs along the Black Sea coast, plunging directly into the sea with only a couple of coastal plains, and the main traffic lanes here were always east-west. Up here are large forests. The diversity of landscape, plant and animal life in



21. The central Anatolian plateau looking towards Alishar from Kerkenes. Photo MTL.

the entire central Anatolian region is so profound that even neighbouring biotopes can offer completely dissimilar conditions for life.

The Assyrians penetrated only certain parts of this wider land, and most of their activities were concentrated in the central highland, a plateau that in the east rises to 1,500 metres above sea level. The central region is cold in winter and very hot in summer. It is watered by a few important rivers, the largest of which is the Kızıl Irmak, the Red River, which runs in a huge bend through the region, emptying its waters in the Black Sea. West of the river lies the vast Salt Lake, Tuz Gölü, and farther to the west one encounters the Cihanbeyli plateau, a large arid region with no mounds from the Bronze Age; we can safely conclude that traffic circumvented this region. Just south of the Salt Lake lies another major site from this period, Achemhöyük. Even farther west is the region of Bolvadin and the two lakes Eber and Akshehir, where we probably have to locate the important centre of Purushaddum. Here we are close to the main watershed, and the large rivers now run towards the west, towards the Aegean Sea through river valleys surrounded by rough mountains. The Assyrians never went farther west than Purushaddum.

The large Konya plain farther to the south, now a major agricultural area dependent on deep drilling for water, appears not to have been visited very



22. Landscape at Boghazköy, ancient Hattush. Photo MTL.

often by the Assyrians, but the huge mound Karahöyük Konya has produced remains from the late period, roughly contemporary with level 1b at Kanesh. The plain has connections with the Cilician plain by way of important passes through the high Taurus Mountains, and it is clear that the Konya plain in most periods was heavily influenced by the centres in Cilicia and Syria.¹

The land north of Kanesh, situated within the great bend of the Kızıl Irmak, was densely settled during the Bronze Age, and we find not only Amkuwa (Alishar) and Hattush (Boghazköy) here, but several mounds which must have been inhabited during the period of the Assyrian trade (Figure 22). Textual evidence points to the location of several towns in this region, and places of secondary importance in the Assyrian network such as Karahna, Kuburnat and Hanaknak are to be found here. Important rivers such as Delice, Çekerek and Yeshil Irmak run through this rich agricultural land.

To the east in the direction of modern Sivas north-east of Kanesh, on the bank of Kızıl Irmak, we encounter the truly immense mound at Kayalıpınar, almost certainly the town Shamuha, which became very important during the time of the Hittite Empire but which also played a role in the Old Assyrian period as a station on the eastern route, the so-called *sukinnu* road (often referred to as “the Narrow Track”) that led from the region of the Elbistan plain towards the copper region around the town Durhumit.²



23. Büklükale on the Kızıl Irmak River. Directly after the Seljuk bridge, the river turns right into a narrow gorge. This is the site suggested by Barjamovic to be the ruins of ancient Wahshushana, and it was clearly a strategic place guarding the crossing of the river in all periods. Photo MTL.

In the west, on a bend of the river at a place where a Seljuk bridge still stands as an indication of the importance of this road, there is a settlement built on a large rocky outcrop that controls the passage across the river, a site known as Kapalı kaya (the Blocked Rock) or Büklükale, the latter name referring to the river's dramatic bend here (Figure 23). Barjamovic has suggested that this site was ancient Wahshushana, the major stop on the copper road from Durhumit to Purushaddum. Current excavations by a Japanese team indicate that there was an important settlement here at the right time, but its ancient name has yet to be ascertained.

A modern map of central Anatolia can give a somewhat misleading impression of the ancient situation, especially with respect to the network of roads. Modern motorways no longer follow the traditional paths through the landscape, circumventing difficulties and obstructions that would have forced ancient travellers to choose different itineraries. One clear example is the main road from Ankara going south to the city Konya, for this motorway running west of the Salt Lake crosses lands without water, regions where donkeys or horses would have been unable to survive for long periods of time. But we have to reckon with the existence of other hindrances to traffic in the Bronze Age of which we now know nothing. Were there large forests along the routes, they would surely have had to be avoided, just to take an example.

It is very difficult to put together the many disparate items of information about the political geography of the central Anatolian region. Even with

respect to the Hittite period it took a very long time before anything like a consensus was established concerning the most important political units, and there is still a great deal of uncertainty when it comes to the location of several important towns and regions.³ The Old Assyrian evidence is in fact more complex, and the scarcity of excavated sites from the period makes it even harder to reconstruct the political landscape.

What can be said with certainty is that the region was divided into several small and large states, each centred on a town of importance. The Assyrians placed their various colonies and stations in or adjacent to these main towns. Barjamovic presents in tabular form thirty-nine names of toponyms known to have played a role in the Old Assyrian trade, and slightly more than twenty of these were the location of a colony, and approximately eleven were that of a station, indicating a less important place, at least in terms of the trade. Perhaps as many as eight sites changed status from that of station to colony during the period of the Old Assyrian presence. Only six of the names can in Barjamovic's estimation be said to have an almost secure identification with a known archaeological site.⁴

It is, in other words, fair to conclude that central Anatolia was a densely urbanised region in this period and furthermore that this rather restricted geographical space was divided into a large number of small and large city-states. However, the analysis of the texts further shows that no more than four toponyms appear very frequently, more than 160 times in the known texts, and a second group of only three towns are mentioned more than 110 times; the rest of the names appear in between 10 and 80 texts. This simple statistical analysis indicates the degree to which the Old Assyrian trade was concentrated on a very small number of towns: the four names in the first group were, apart from Kanesh, Purushaddum, Durhumit and Hahhum, places that were clearly the main markets in central Anatolia; the three towns in the second group should be regarded as the main transit stations: Zalpa, Shalatuwar and Timelkiya; and the rest were simply places of less importance to the Assyrians, places that were occasionally visited and where either no permanent Assyrian presence was the norm or only a limited number of persons stayed. We should keep in mind that this does not necessarily mean that the less frequented sites were smaller or of no great political importance; they were simply not so interesting from a commercial point of view.

The ethnic distribution in central Anatolia is extremely difficult to describe in detail, and the Assyrians did not attempt to do so but referred to Anatolians by the term *nuā'u*, possibly an onomapoeticon referring to incomprehensible speech like Greek *barbaroi*. The later Hittite evidence

points to the presence of groups called Hittites (Neshites), Luwians, Palaeans, Hattians and Hurrians, called Subareans by the Old Assyrians. The three first groups spoke Indo-European languages; the Hattian language is poorly attested and not related to any other tongue, and Hurrian was spoken all over the south-east of Asia Minor, with a much later relative in the Urartean language attested in the first millennium BC in texts from the Van region.

Most of the people of Kanesh spoke Hittite, judging from their personal names, which were formed in this language.⁵ We also know that Kanesh itself was later known as Nesha and was regarded as the home city of the Hittite language called *nešumili*. The later form of the name indicates that the city was in fact called Kneš, a form that could not be represented by the cuneiform system of writing.⁶ The personal names in the Old Assyrian texts reveal several different linguistic groups in existence, but it is not possible on the basis of our material to suggest a match between languages and geography.

The political system in these many towns and kingdoms was radically different from the one the Assyrians knew from their own home city. Although it is possible that an oligarchy was introduced as a result of a kind of revolution in the important town Hahhum, as suggested by the text of the treaty discussed later,⁷ in all other Anatolian states we find a centralised monarchical system of government with a royal couple at the apex. Some texts refer to decisions taken by ruling queens, apparently governing alone, and a reasonable conclusion is that the couple, king and queen, ruled together and that when one of them died, the other continued in office.

Although little is known of the physical arrangement of the palaces in the excavated towns, it is clear that in Anatolia they functioned as the central administrative and economic institutions, run by a large staff. The Assyrian texts mention almost fifty different titles of persons who were in charge of various activities and personnel, and at least some of those were closely connected with the palace administration.⁸ The chief cup-bearer was one such official, together presumably with the majordomo (*rabi bētim*), the chief sceptre-bearer, the chief of the storehouses, the chief of the tables (surely the man responsible for the royal meals), the chief vizier and perhaps the man in charge of the slaves.

The texts from the later 1b period which deal with affairs of Anatolians were certified by the king and his chief official, who had the title *rabi simmiltim*, “chief of the stairway”, a strange designation whose background is lost to us. It has been thought that it referred to the crown prince, but that

is quite unclear; only one of the men who were referred to in this way became a king, Anitta son of Pithana. One of the few texts found in the palace on the mound at Kültepe was a list of personnel of a man called Turupani, who had this title; in all, forty named persons appear in this document, some said to belong to the entourage of the chief of storerooms, others having posts in various villages, a carpenter, a messenger and two blacksmiths, summed up as follows: “they are all servants of Turupani, the chief of the stairway.”⁹

In texts from the main period the Anatolian king occasionally appears together with a man who is called the *rabi sikkitim*, probably the title of the highest military official. There was such a man in all major towns, and these were highly influential and powerful men. Shalim-Assur was at one point embroiled in a lawsuit in which his opponent was an important Anatolian, and a verdict was issued jointly by the king and the *rabi sikkitim*, whose name was Walishra.¹⁰ In another text we are told that this official had to get very prominent Anatolian figures, the king of Purushaddum, the somewhat mysterious Ushinalam¹¹ and the king of Wahshushana, to take an oath before it was safe for an Assyrian to go to Wahshushana.¹² The significant role of this official in the relations between the palaces and the Assyrians can be seen from a letter:

A fire has consumed the palace here and this has completely preoccupied the court, so it is not opportune to ask the *rabi sikkitim* for silver. The man has spent all his money for the country. I shall come over and see you personally, and then, when the country is back to normal, I shall bring five textiles of royal quality; I shall enter together with the envoys of the colony, and the man will become ashamed because of the five textiles I shall be offering to him, and I shall be able to collect my silver.¹³

A letter from Ali-ahum to his partner Damiq-pi-Assur shows how the death of this official could have an unsettling effect on the mood of the country; we do not know where the recipient of the letter was at this time, but he is asked to go to the local palace immediately after having heard the letter and satisfy the officials, because “the *rabi sikkitim* has died (here). Get away before the country hears it!”¹⁴

There were several other, less important officials who were in charge of practically all sectors of the kingdom’s administration and economy: chiefs in charge of the city gates and gatekeepers, the threshing floors, the market, the wood, weapons, wine, oil, barley, vegetables, the fullers, the guards, blacksmiths, gardens, gardeners, shepherds, workers, interpreters, bitches, oxen, mules and horses. These offices were handed out by the monarch, normally

in exchange for costly presents, as we read in a letter from a high-ranking Anatolian gentleman to his Assyrian friend:

Now the ruler is offering me no less than two offices, that of *allahhinnum* (steward) and that of *šinahilum* (second in command), and I have promised the king a gift, a big one.¹⁵

The writer, a certain Huharimataku, is offering this information in the hope that his Assyrian correspondent will present him with a mule, a very expensive animal, so that he can join the army in style. "I am truly your son, so should I go on foot?" he writes. No doubt the possibility that he would become an important palace official would sharpen the interest of his Assyrian friend.

Dercksen's analysis of Anatolian society has shown the monarch's involvement in matters of landholding and the duties connected with that. Houses given by the king carried an obligation to do certain types of work for the state, and members of the proletariat of the kingdom had to perform a kind of *corvée*, but that does not appear to have been connected with landholding. Special duties of a military nature were tied to other royal grants known as *tuzinum*, and a rather obscure term, *ubadinnum*, is interpreted as a royal land grant to high officials. Many such officials appeared to own land outright as well, in some cases whole villages. The situation described by Dercksen is one where the monarch and the palace played a large role, in particular in dealings with the land distributed to the leading officials.¹⁶

The largely unpublished archive of such a high official, Peruwa, who was chief of the shepherds, does not contain references to royal grants or interference from the palace. The texts show that he functioned as a moneylender, that he sold and bought slaves and that he had a special relationship to a village known as Talwahshushara. Many texts refer to loans of money and grain to persons from this village, often to be repaid at harvest time. It may be that a kind of communal ownership of land was in existence in this place.

Another village called Tumliya had a close connection with Shalim-Assur and his family, who bought very large quantities of barley and wheat from there. Whereas Peruwa was in direct contact with individual villagers, the Shalim-Assur family dealt only with a couple of men who were either headmen of the village or who owned both the land and the villagers. These scattered observations indicate that the social structure of the Kanesh kingdom was quite complex and that the agricultural sector showed a variety of patterns of ownership.¹⁷

Although we know very little about the daily life in the palaces, we are not in doubt about the importance of the role played by the kings and queens.

The monarch was directly involved in all negotiations with the Assyrians, in many instances when a treaty was to be formulated or renewed, and occasionally in situations where a legal or diplomatic matter had to be resolved.

During the period of the Assyrian presence, Anatolia went through a phase of political change and upheaval. Apart from the evidence of destruction layers at Kültepe, surely caused by conquering armies, as well as the references to dynastic changes caused by warfare, we read repeatedly of unrest in the various countries in the region. The merchants did not take a direct interest in these events, except when they became hindrances to the trade, so what we find is typically that turbulence in an area is blocking caravans and making travel dangerous.

The analysis of the political situation is to some extent dependent on the understanding of a technical term, the word *sikkātum*, about which a lot has been written. It has been seen as referring to warfare by some and as a designation for a religious festival by others.¹⁸ That two such different interpretations can exist is due partly to the lack of a single truly revealing text and partly to the lack of a convincing etymology and evidence from other periods. The idea of a festival builds in large measure on evidence from Hittite sources, for there we read of many such religious events, where the king and the court travelled round the country to visit holy places. It has been suggested that a similar practice existed in the Old Assyrian period and that on the occasion of such festivals not only the court but a large proportion of the population would leave the city and go to the countryside. It is thought, for instance, that this explains why the Assyrians several times described the markets as closed and trade disrupted when a *sikkātum* event was in progress. Also, the expectation of this state of affairs ending within a few days, to which there are frequent references, has been seen as impossible or at least difficult to explain if warfare was being referred to.

The matter cannot be said to have been finally cleared up, but in my opinion the most convincing interpretation of these textual passages is that they are references to hostilities and war. In a couple of letters that are concerned with a situation in Wahshushana, one text uses the term *sikkātum*, whereas another letter referring to the same event speaks of the land being “in a state of unrest” (*mātum sahi’at*).¹⁹ Perhaps the clearest example that points to this conclusion is from a letter exchanged by two Assyrians:

Here the king has fallen in the *sikkātum*, and a state of revolt exists within the city itself, so we fear for our heads. There are enemies over a distance of an hour and a half’s travel, and no one is able to go out into the countryside. One even tries to make us set out together with him to do battle. In the meantime no contracts must be drawn up, lest we become indebted

to our investors for no less than a talent of silver. When the country is at peace again and the king will conclude an agreement with him, letters will be sent again.²⁰

At any rate, the sources that inform us about unrest and war do not just use the disputed term, and numerous texts indicate that this period was marked by a whole series of violent encounters, so the picture we can draw of a number of wars shows a political process that involved a territorial centralisation, with fewer, larger political units and a system of vassals rather than independent, minor city-states. The end result was, of course, the creation of the Old Hittite kingdom, where the crucial players were Anitta, Labarna I and Hattushili I in the seventeenth century BC.

The best-known wars took place in the western sector of the Assyrian network and involved the cities Purushaddum, Shalatuwar, Ulama and Wahshushana.²¹ A letter from the station at Shalatuwar to the colony at Wahshushana explains that the king of Purushaddum has ordered Shalatuwar to attack Wahshushana or become his enemy. Apparently, the king of Shalatuwar refused and his city was open to an attack from Purushaddum. We are told in Assyrian correspondence that the station there was relocated to Wahshushana, apparently in the expectation of a devastating attack from a superior enemy. This war can be dated tentatively to the eponym years in the seventies, namely ca. 1895 BC.

About twenty years later Wahshushana and Purushaddum were again involved in hostilities that can be dated to around 1873 BC. Here we meet with the already mentioned Ushinalam, who is involved in a conflict with Shalatuwar; another text speaks of an insurrection inside that town apparently involving the local assembly, and we have references to a revolt in Wahshushana; finally, it appears that also Ulama south of the Salt Lake was drawn into the war. At one point Ili-wedaku could inform Puzur-Assur that there was now peace in Purushaddum after that city had taken an oath, that is, concluded a treaty with Ulama.²²

All of these events could have been isolated incidents, but the fact that they seem to have happened at the same time indicates that this was a major war that came to involve all the important players in the western sector of central Anatolia.

The very late Kuliya archive edited by Veenhof, the only well-known, coherent group of texts from the period after the collapse around eponym year 110, which covers the years 124–36 (ca. 1849–1836), contains a letter that refers to events in Wahshushana. Here we are told that the inhabitants have left the city, presumably in anticipation of a military disaster; this piece of

information can then be connected to a letter from the king in Assur to the Kanesh colony in which we read:

We hear that Anatolians and traders are carrying valid records belonging to merchants out of Wahshushana, and that “small men” are buying them wholesale outside the city.²³

We may conclude that a major disaster had hit Wahshushana, forcing the Assyrian community to leave in haste and abandon their archives, which were then looted by both ordinary Anatolians and local traders, presumably also Anatolians, because such valid deeds were worth money. This was such a serious calamity that even the authorities in Assur had to deal with it and issue rules for the proper conduct of the colonial system. Wahshushana was rebuilt and is known to have functioned in the later Old Assyrian period.

The central Anatolian region was marked by wars and unrest as well. In one very fragmentary text we are told that the small city-states Shinahuttum, Amkuwa and Kapitra have started hostilities against the king of Hattush, and it appears that Kanesh also became involved in this war,²⁴ but all we can say is that peace appears to have been a rarity in this part of Anatolia. These events in time, during the later Old Assyrian period of level 1b, led to a drastically altered political landscape. One gets the distinct impression from the early period that the Assyrians had to contend with a quite large number of small principalities, with whom treaties had to be set up, but in the later period a few major states had formed. Kanesh itself was at one point conquered by Pithana, who came from a city called Kushara, and his son Anitta began a campaign that eventually led to the conquest of a very large portion of the central Anatolian region, including Shalatuwar and Hattush. Even before that Kanesh had expanded in all directions, and in the south the state Mamma had conquered areas deep into the north Syrian region.²⁵

The so-called Warshama letter found in the palace on the mound in Kanesh gives us a clear description of what the political scene was like; it was sent by King Anum-hirbe of Mamma to Warshama of Kanesh:

You have written me, saying: “The man of Taishama is my slave. I shall personally deal with him; then you yourself should deal with the man of Sibuha, your slave.”

Since the man of Taishama is your dog, why does he plot with other kings? Does my dog, the man of Sibuha, plot with other kings? Shall the king of Taishama become a king and equal with us?

When my enemy defeated me, the man of Taishama then invaded and he destroyed twelve of my villages. He took their cattle and sheep. He said: "The king is dead, so I am now free to go fowling." Instead of protecting my land and giving support he burnt down my land and left only evil-smelling smoke.

When your father Inar was besieging the city Harsamna for nine years, did my land fall on yours and kill cattle and sheep? ...

Now you write: "Let us swear an oath." But is the previous oath insufficient? Your messenger should come here; then my messenger will come to you.²⁶

Kanesh had expanded south into the Taurus so that it now had a frontier with the state of Mamma, and in the mountains both had vassals – contemptuously referred to as "dogs" – who had to be kept on a leash. That was presumably the situation all over central Anatolia during this final phase of the Assyrian presence. It is not possible to write the history of the region, but a few glimpses appear here and there. A late letter, recently published and datable precisely to the year of Shamshi-Adad's death in 1776 BC, tells us that at this time the king of Harsamna, called Hurmeli, was at war with the neighbouring state of Zalpa and that he had written to the city assembly at Assur to complain that their king had sent troops to aid Zalpa:

The sun, our lord, wrote us a letter and sent your envoys Hazalam and Hudurla to us. Having blocked the roads you sent us a long message expressing your unhappiness. However, even before your letter arrived the king Shamshi-Adad, our lord, had gone to his fate, and until his son Ishme-Dagan had been seated on his father's throne, until this day, we did not send our messengers to you.

You had written: "When your lord gave troops to the man of Zalpa, why did you not fall at his feet to make him refrain from giving troops to the man of Zalpa?"

However, even before the sun, our lord, wrote this to us, we had certainly not been negligent here. Repeatedly we fell at the feet of our lord and said: "Desist! Do not give troops to the man of Zalpa lest you incur the anger of your brother, the man of Harsamna, the great king!"

We submitted this plea to our lord and fell at his feet, but he answered:

"You merchants – are you my own slaves or the slaves of the man of Harsamna? Indeed, will you take up weapons and follow after me? No, you are merchants! Keep pursuing your business as well as you can on the caravan trail! Why do you interfere in the affairs of us important kings?"²⁷

This letter also shows that the elders of the City adopted a very humble attitude towards the Anatolian king, a far cry from the letters known from level 2. They refer to the king of Harsamna as “the sun, our lord”, they refer to themselves as “your slaves” and they end by protesting that they pray to Assur “for your life and the welfare of Harsamna”. Clearly, the relationship between the Assyrians and the major Anatolian rulers had changed drastically. Since they could not offer a coalition with Shamshi-Adad, they instead sent him a “fine gift: 80 textiles from Assur and 20 textiles from Akkade” and expressed the hope that he would reopen the roads.

THE COLONIAL SYSTEM

THE CREATION OF THE COLONIAL SYSTEM IN NORTHERN SYRIA AND central Anatolia must have taken time. How it happened is quite unclear. The wide steppes north-west of Assur were rich agricultural lands with many villages and towns, and we find the names of some of them in occasional lists of expenses incurred by caravans travelling to Anatolia. Unfortunately, the historical and political situation in Syria in the nineteenth century is very poorly known. The region steps into the full glare of history during the later period, in the eighteenth century, when the texts found in the palace at Mari on the Middle Euphrates were written. They show a fully developed system of small kingdoms and city-states and a political pattern that is eternally shifting with alliances, wars and conquests. The situation depicted by the texts from the palace at Mari must have its roots in the preceding century, but we cannot be certain that the understanding we can glean from the Mari texts is in all respects relevant to the nineteenth century, when the Assyrian donkey caravans plodded through the region.

Assur was presumably a trading city already in the time of the Ur III Empire at the end of the twenty-first century. A few individuals whose names tell us that they were Assyrians are found in texts from that period; they were visiting towns in the south, and at least some of them are characterised as merchants.¹ The city was not only linked closely to the south, for we may assume that the merchants of Assur always had a special relationship with the nomadic societies in the western steppe, and it has been suggested that the city was a focal point for the life of these groups, as a place of worship and as a suitable winter quarters for the tribal chieftains.² Significant contacts with the areas to the west and the many developing towns in the Syrian steppe would accordingly reach far back into prehistory.

The economic reforms instituted under Ilushuma and Erishum I appear to have been designed to draw merchants from the south, from Babylonia,

to Assur in order to establish commercial links to an existing commercial network connecting Assur with the west. But there is a mystery here, for during the heyday of the Old Assyrian trade it appears that the merchants from Assur did not conduct any extensive or serious trade with the cities in the steppe, as the caravans sent off from Assur were sealed and the packages with tin and textiles were not opened until the caravans had arrived in Anatolia or crossed the Euphrates. Caravan personnel did conduct a trade in small amounts of tin and textiles along the way, their opportunity to realise a profit that would be their pay, but there is no evidence to suggest that caravans from Assur were meant for cities in northern Syria. The important city Hahhum, located near a major crossing of the Euphrates in south-eastern Turkey, was a kind of border town separating the commercially interesting Anatolia from Syria, and this was the point where caravans could be opened and split into smaller consignments. Travel expenses were often reckoned separately for the two parts of the entire journey: from Assur to Hahhum and from there to Kanesh.³ How did that situation come about?

There were in fact several Assyrian colonies and trading stations in the region of the steppe, and it cannot be ruled out that the nature of our evidence, so completely concentrated on the interests of the men and women in Kanesh, for whom the activities in northern Syria were perhaps of limited significance, presents an incomplete or even a skewed picture of the Assyrian trade. On the other hand, can we really assume that the men in Kanesh and the other colonies in Anatolia would not have been involved in a commercial exploitation of the rich lands and towns in the Syrian steppe – if that was possible? At least occasionally a caravan would have been directed towards one of those towns, where an eager and promising market would surely have existed – if that had been allowed.

There is no simple explanation for why the caravans to Anatolia could not even be opened before they reached the Euphrates. The reason must surely be sought in the geopolitical situation in the entire region, and it is most likely that at least during the main period of the trade, the Assyrians were simply barred from trading in the towns of the steppe. There were other major players in the commercial system of the time. One of these was the city called Emar,⁴ located on the banks of the Euphrates, and another was a large walled city called Ebla, 50 kilometres south of modern Aleppo. Both of these towns were important commercial centres, and whereas Emar has become the victim of one of the huge dams on the Euphrates and cannot be excavated, Ebla has been under investigation for many years by an Italian team.⁵

Emar was clearly a very important commercial hub which could well have dominated trade in most of the north Syrian region. The Assyrians

are bound to have had agreements with this city, and it seems likely to me that part of such an agreement would have been rules concerning Anatolia-bound caravans passing through territory which was Emar's sphere of interest. Ebla, on the other hand, is known to have sent merchants to Anatolia, although they are mentioned only a very few times, and in order to understand the way in which Assur and Ebla may have divided up their interests we should notice that no caravan from Assur is known to have visited or passed through the region called Cilicia. Surely, this rich agricultural region with an important city like Tarsus would have been interesting from a commercial point of view. Moreover, the main road through the Taurus Mountains, the Cilician Gates, would take traders directly up to the important Konya plain. Interestingly, the excavations of one of the major sites in this region, the huge mound Karahöyük Konya, found evidence of close connections with Syria, for instance in the design of cylinder seals; Assyrian merchants only infrequently mention the Konya plain region, and Karahöyük itself, presumably known in antiquity as Ushsha, appears only a few times in the texts. The most reasonable conclusion must be that they were somehow barred from exploiting this region.

It would seem, therefore, that this Bronze Age world was divided into distinct spheres of commercial interest, and an indication of the seriousness of the rules governing this system can be found in a draft for a treaty between the Assyrians and an unknown minor kingdom somewhere in the Taurus Mountains. The local king is here to swear that he will not allow any Akkadian traders (i.e., merchants from Babylonia) into his lands; if they come anyway, he must arrest them and hand them over to the Assyrians "so we can kill them".⁶



AT THE MOMENT WE KNOW OF AROUND FORTY ASSYRIAN ESTABLISHMENTS, most of them referred to as *kārum*, usually translated "colony", and a few known as *wabartum*, a term we render "trading station". The latter word is related to the designation for a guest; another term derived from the same root occurs in the expression *bēt wabrim*, "guest-house" or "inn", where travelling caravans could spend the night.

The word *kārum* has ancient roots. In Sumer and Babylonia, on the vast alluvial plain that was a land of rivers and canals, every city had a harbour or at least a quay. Boats landed there, bringing provisions and goods from other cities and countries, and the local traders had their warehouses there.⁷ These were busy places, always on the outskirts of the cities, since commerce and all the things associated with trade had to be kept at a distance.⁸ There was

too much uncertainty, too great a risk involved in trade. Fortunes could be made and lost in a day, and the stability of status, rank, and traditions was threatened by the merchants and their activities – wealthy and powerful today, bankrupt tomorrow. Obviously, they performed a necessary service for society, but it was safest not to incorporate them directly into the ordered life of the cities. This pattern is known all over the world, where we find double cities, one for the stable pursuit of government and one for the merchants – think of London divided into Westminster and the City, Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco or Cairo and Fustat.

The quay or port became the merchants' quarters and the word *kārum* in time came to denote the community of merchants that existed here, a community that retained a separate identity and had a degree of self-government, led by an official known as *wakil tamkāri*, the overseer of the merchants. This is, of course, the same word, *waklum*, that was used in Assur as one of the titles of the king.

So in Babylonian cities of a certain size we find a *kārum* as a normal feature of the urban landscape. Inevitably, traders from certain cities began to develop commercial interests in other communities, and in some cases this led individual merchants or groups to set up shop in other cities. Regular commercial links between cities resulted in the establishment of a kind of colony in the foreign city, so that we hear of “the *kārum* of Sippar who reside in Mari and Mishlan”, and in Sippar we find a “street of the men of Isin”.⁹ Texts from Babylonia show that merchants from the city Larsa in the deep south had representatives in Eshnunna in the Diyala region and in Susa in Khuzestan, people who apparently lived more or less permanently abroad, but who continued to set up their documents using their own dialect and calendar system.¹⁰

The people of Assur used the terminology differently and the city itself conforms to a different political and commercial pattern. It was in its very origin a commercial society, a city-state that owed its existence to the role it played in the international commerce, and in that respect we should probably compare it to the Italian cities of the Renaissance, Florence, Lucca or Genoa. Like these cities Assur was dominated by merchants who formed a kind of commercial aristocracy, and it seems not unreasonable to characterise Assur in the nineteenth century as a *kārum* in itself. However, the Assyrians did not call their colony at Kanesh “the *kārum* Assur who reside in Kanesh”. They referred to it as *kārum* Kanesh.

Michel 2014 has expressed misgivings over the use of the translation “colony” for the word *kārum*, pointing out that this terminology usually implies political control. This has been stressed by Gil Stein,¹¹ who suggested that we

use the model of a trade diaspora for a better understanding of the material from Kültepe. He emphasised the maintenance of a separate cultural identity as a strongly determined element in such a construction along with political and judicial independence, and he claimed that “being different is the essence of a trade diaspora.”¹² In my view his model is relevant to an understanding of aspects of the Old Assyrian presence in Anatolia: its stress on the commercial basis for the colonies and the retention of specific cultural traditions. However, it risks downplaying the complexities of the social and cultural relations that can be directly observed and described. Highlighting the differences rather than the ongoing process of negotiation and manipulation that characterises the interaction between Assyrians and Anatolians in my view presents a one-sided picture of the developing situation.¹³

Michel accepted his critique of the use of the term “colony”, but she found that the concept of a trade diaspora was not satisfactory either. It is, of course, quite true that drawing a historical parallel to the era of colonialism, when western Europe expanded and subjugated vast areas of the globe, is not relevant to an understanding of the events in Anatolia during the Middle Bronze Age. It seems to me, though, that we may fruitfully distinguish between colonialism and colonisation, where the first term denotes expansion and the establishment of political and military control over subjugated peoples, features that are not necessarily associated with the second term. I would therefore maintain that the term “colony” is still useful when it is embedded in a clear description of the relationship between Assyrians and Anatolians. In fact, there is a long tradition of using the term “colony” to denote commercial establishments created in a foreign land. Thus, economic historians traditionally refer to the Italian commercial settlements created in the Middle Ages in the Mediterranean region as merchant colonies; they were like the Old Assyrian settlements based on treaties obtained from the local rulers. Such colonies were sometimes just a street, or they could be an entire quarter of a town. The concessions in Muslim countries usually led to setting up a *fondaco*, which was walled and closed, and such establishments were normally governed by officials sent out from the mother city.¹⁴

The Assyrians divided their world into two units: *ālum*, “the city”, namely their home city Assur, and *eqlum*, a word that denoted a field or a plot of land and which by extension came to mean “abroad”, in a sense “not-city”. In the fully developed system depicted in the texts from level 2 at Kültepe, the Assyrian settlements, more than twenty colonies in northern Syria and Anatolia, were part of a tightly integrated governmental system that had its centre in Assur. At the apex was the City, the bureaucratic institution of the

home city Assur already described; on the next level all Assyrian settlements abroad were under the authority of the central colony at Kanesh, and the various smaller trading stations answered to the nearest colony. This strict hierarchy was already in evidence in the letter referred to earlier, where the City ordered the Kanesh colony to pay for fortifications at Assur and then see to it that all the other colonies sent their own contributions. Another example already mentioned is the letter sent from the Kanesh colony to "all colonies and trading stations" informing these of the new rules concerning taxation on meteoric iron promulgated by the City.¹⁵

At one point the colony established in the north Syrian city Urshu had been the victim of a heinous crime when thieves broke into the local chapel dedicated to Assur and stole all the valuables there, including the sacred ornaments that were attached to the statue of the god. This calamity was duly reported, not to the authorities of the Assur temple in the capital, but to the Kanesh colony in a further example of the proper chain of command, where all the colonies abroad answered to the central colony, which would then presumably promptly inform the relevant people in Assur.¹⁶

Obviously, relations with the local authorities both in northern Syria and in Anatolia were monitored closely by the Kanesh colony and ultimately by the city assembly in Assur. There are several references to special envoys of the city assembly, who came to Kanesh and perhaps even stayed there for long periods. They represented the interests of the city assembly, and it seems that they were involved in all serious negotiations whenever problems arose concerning relations with Anatolian authorities. In some instances this meant intervening when individual Assyrians got in trouble with local officials, but the most important task must have been to oversee the negotiations leading to the establishment of treaties with Anatolian kings. Recently two such treaties have been published, one with the Kingdom of Hahhum and one with Kanesh, but both texts stem from the later period of level 1b and may accordingly not in all respects reflect the situation in the much better documented earlier level 2 period.¹⁷ On the other hand, we are no longer entirely dependent on the sometimes obscure references in private letters that mention such negotiations.

One of the most well known of these letters refers to problems with the Kingdom of Hahhum, and it may in fact throw some light on the background of the treaty we now have. We are informed in the letter (which is from the period of level 2) that serious trouble has arisen, the king is said to have "committed a bloody deed and his throne is insecure". The Assyrians try in vain to ensure their own interests in attempts to engage in negotiations with the local nobles, but they are not willing to enter into serious

talks, so the situation is completely unstable – and this in a vitally important link in the Assyrian commercial network. The letter does not tell us what eventually happened in Hahhum, but it is probably significant that in the treaty there is no mention of a local king at all. The Anatolian partners to the agreement are simply referred to as plural “you”, and only three magistrates are said to exercise the right to pre-emption of a certain number of imported textiles. A reasonable conclusion is that the crisis referred to in the letter ended with a revolution in which the king was deposed and the nobles took power.¹⁸

The entire system of colonies and trading stations was built on the basis of agreements between the Assyrian merchants and the local rulers, arrangements that were, of course, understood to be of mutual benefit. The Assyrians could offer their wares, and the tin certainly was of major strategic importance, since it allowed for the production of bronze. The luxury textiles imported in the thousands were of obvious value to the local elites as markers of their social superiority. The treaties gave clear rules for the level of taxation and the right to pre-emption for the palaces, and in this way the rulers were secured a steady supply and presumably a considerable income. In return they granted the merchants the right to settle in their cities, and the Assyrian community enjoyed extraterritorial rights, including self-government and their own judicial institutions. Even more important, the Anatolian rulers guaranteed the safety of their roads and accepted the responsibility for finding and prosecuting robbers who attacked and plundered Assyrian caravans. At least in some cases they even recompensed the losses incurred. These elements of the agreements are preserved in the extant treaties, and they are amply documented in a number of letters dealing with such problems. The palaces had guards at strategic places in their territories, and we sometimes read that caravans find it prudent to pay small amounts to the soldiers manning the posts.

A draft exists for a treaty with a ruler of an unknown small kingdom in the south-eastern part of the region, a text that presumably belongs to the period of level 2. It is phrased as the statement of the Assyrian negotiators to the kinglet and his dignitaries, who swore the oath together with him:

There shall be no loss of (property) belonging to an Assyrian in your country – rope, peg or anything at all.

If a loss occurs in your country you shall search for (what was lost) and then return it to us.

If bloodshed occurs in your country you shall hand over the killers to us, so we may kill them.

You may not let Akkadians come here. If they do travel to your country, you must give them to us so we may kill them.

You shall not demand anything from us. Like your father you may take 12 shekels of tin per donkey-load in caravans going up (to Anatolia). You may – like your father – use $1\frac{1}{4}$ shekels of silver per donkey-load on the way down. You cannot take anything more.

If no caravan is coming because of warfare, they will send you 5 pounds of tin from Hahhum.

He raised his hand in prayer to the gods Assur and Adad, to the Netherworld and the spirit of his father; he overturned his table and his chair, filled his cup and poured it out. The king said: “May he turn me to naught ...” They (the dignitaries) said: “If we reject your oath, may our blood be spilled like (the wine) in this cup!”¹⁹

This was an agreement with a small fish in the system, one who profited in a limited way from the passage of the Assyrian caravans going up and down through the Taurus passes. The treaty was clearly set up in connection with the installation of a new king, after his father had died. His tax of 12 shekels²⁰ of tin was only a small part of a donkey-load, but it seems clear that it would amount to several pounds every year, since he received a guarantee of at least 5 pounds even if the road was closed. In return he had to organise secure roads in his territory, and he was responsible for catching thieves and murderers. The passage about Akkadians – that is, merchants from far-away Babylonia – is probably to be seen as a reflection of the kingdom’s location in the Taurus, not too far from the Syrian steppe. There is no indication anywhere that Babylonians went much farther and penetrated the Anatolian region. But even in the mountains they had no rights and could be dealt with by the Assyrians.

The two other treaties²¹ we have were set up with Kanesh and Hahhum, much more important Anatolian states where the Assyrians had a permanent settlement, and they reflect this in several ways. Both refer to regular taxation rather than the transit fee mentioned in the first text, and we meet here the classic terminology so well attested in the many texts concerning caravan transactions.

Certain fundamental elements of the relationship between the Assyrian traders and the local kings were never directly addressed in the treaties we have. Since they are all incomplete, it cannot be ruled out that the features we lack may have been found in the damaged parts, but such basic rights as the entitlement to own houses in the Anatolian towns and to settle there with a family, the privilege to conduct trade with the local population and

the right to extraterritoriality may have been seen as so obvious that they did not have to be dealt with explicitly. What the treaties do concern themselves with are the situations where such rights could be questioned or limited (see Figure 24).

The ruler must agree not to covet or seize houses, fields, gardens or slaves belonging to Assyrians, for instance, and he has to accept that the Assyrians were not obliged to perform *corvée*, forced labour on royal projects, duties that were otherwise normally tied to landholding. Another area of enormous importance to the Assyrians was their right to maintain and make use of their own political, administrative and legal institutions. As we know from the letters and judicial documents from the private archives, the assemblies in the various colonies took care of practically all legal conflicts, including those between Assyrians and Anatolians, but the treaties deal in some detail with those special cases where the king and his officers took an active part because for some reason they could not be completed by the Assyrian authorities. We do not know why some conflicts were to be dealt with by the Anatolian kings, but in most instances they presumably involved prominent local actors, most likely royal officials. It is also possible that the Assyrian right to use their own judicial structures had become somewhat eroded in the later period. The rulers at Hahhum had to agree not to

take any administrative decisions against an Assyrian or the Hahhum *kārum* by siding with your soldiers, slave girls and slaves or citizens of Hahhum. You must not issue verdicts based on special agreements, but you must give a fair verdict in accordance with normal judicial practice in Hahhum.²²

It was further stipulated that if an oath was imposed on an Assyrian, he should be allowed to swear by the symbols of his own gods. This also meant that the special Anatolian practice of the river ordeal could not be forced on an Assyrian. In a very special situation where a merchant had been arrested and accused of espionage in the service of another Anatolian king, the local colony sent representatives to negotiate with the king and queen, and in that unusual predicament they declared their willingness to have the man “go to the River like a citizen of your city”.²³ Another text tells us that a local king and his chief officer had issued a verdict in a case involving a prominent Assyrian and a local dignitary. The solution imposed involved sending a representative of the Assyrian trader to the ordeal by river, but this was clearly seen as unacceptable by him, so he set up a group of mediators, four Anatolians and four Assyrians, who put aside the king’s verdict and imposed a less drastic solution based on the payment of some money.²⁴



24. The treaty with the rulers of Hahhum. Kültepe Excavation Archives.

The Kingdom of Hahhum controlled one of the main crossings of the Euphrates, and the treaty refers directly to this in a passage dealing with losses and the rules for compensation:

You must not give instruction to the ferrymen that they should falsely or with evil intent let a boat sink so that merchandise is lost. Any losses that result, whether from a sinking boat or in other ways in the river, in the mountains or anywhere in your land, you must compensate all, even ropes, pegs or a staff.

Even more dramatic than theft was, of course, murder, a danger faced by the Assyrian traders who very often found themselves on the road alone or with a servant or two. The robbers were presumably most often villagers who were tempted by the wealth of the small caravans passing through their remote territories, miles from the main cities and deep in a mountain valley or on the trail through a forest. It seems clear, however, that in most cases the robbers would come to regret their acts, and although the treaties contain very explicit rules for what the local authorities should do when robbery and murder occur, it seems that there was not a need to apply them very often. The letters certainly contain occasional references to murder and robbery, but the Assyrians clearly thought of this as a relatively small risk.

More often we hear that the roads were dangerous because of warfare or local uprisings; the caravan trade could be blocked for a period and that meant serious problems for the traders. They could be stuck in a town far from Kanesh, unable to send off their goods or money, perhaps missing the vital connection with the long-distance caravans back to Assur because winter would intervene and make passage through the passes of the Taurus Mountains impossible. And it appears that during the time of the Assyrian trade, Anatolia was going through a turbulent phase in which power was being concentrated in fewer, larger political units, a situation that led to many wars, small and great, involving both minor city-states and some of the developing territorial states. Obviously, the treaties could not offer protection against such contingencies, and all the Assyrians could do was to steer clear of the hostilities and attempt to continue their commercial activities. This was hazardous but not impossible, for merchants, like the Bedouin nomads of the steppe, “can travel through war and peace” – as explained a hundred years later by a sheikh speaking to an envoy of the king of Mari.²⁵

The risks for the merchants were very real, of course. We have already heard of the case of the town called Wahshushana, where there was an important Assyrian trading station, which was attacked, captured and destroyed.²⁶

And we also know that the lower town at Kanesh was destroyed at the end of the flourishing period of level 2, surely again as a result of warfare.

During the heyday of the trade in the level 2 period, caravans arrived with their wares at Kanesh with great regularity, and we possess a number of accounts written by the men who took care of the sale of the goods, texts in which they itemise expenses of all kinds. They therefore also inform us of the duties of the Assyrian merchants towards the palace, the system of taxation imposed by the treaties. Unfortunately, the treaty texts we have are damaged and provide only limited information about taxes, and, moreover, they are late and therefore may reflect a changed system. We can see, however, that the palaces retained the right to a tax called *nishatum*, literally “something torn out”, what we may call an excise or import tax. In the classic system this amounted to 5 percent of the textiles brought into the palace and 4 pounds of tin on every donkey-load (130 pounds); on top of this the palace had the right of pre-emption, buying at a discount up to 10 percent of the textiles.

In general we may assume, despite the lack of conclusive evidence from the treaties, that these rules or something very similar persisted in the late period. We learn that at Hahhum the three main officials of the city are allowed to buy 5, 2 and 1 textiles each at a discount “when a caravan has come up from the city of Assur, after fifty, a hundred or more loaded donkeys have been cleared,” that is, after the proper taxes had been paid.

These substantial contributions to the wealth of the palace and its leading officials must have nourished a strong desire in the rulers to facilitate the trade and maintain a secure system of roads, guards, bridges and forts that could protect the Assyrian merchants. And it seems that at least during the main period this functioned well to the benefit of all involved. At the same time elements of this infrastructure could be used by the palaces to keep a close watch over the activities of the Assyrian merchants, in particular to prevent smuggling.

In order to pay taxes caravans had to enter the capital cities of the many states in Anatolia. Traffic in and out of the cities was checked at the main gates, and the caravans then went straight to the palace, usually located on the mound itself, towering over the city. Some Assyrians were very happy to cheat the authorities, and one character, Pushu-ken’s son Buzazu, who is otherwise known for some sharp dealings with his own family members and partners, is very explicit in his instructions to his colleagues who are asked to organise smuggling at the city Hurama:

Let them bring the tin to Hurama and then either some local people from Hurama should bring in all the tin in packets of 60 pounds, or else have

them prepare packages of between 10 and 15 pounds each and let the staff of the caravan bring them in concealed in their clothes. Only after they have safely delivered 60 pounds must they bring the next 60 pounds in.²⁷

It is not known whether this manoeuvre worked, but there was another way of smuggling. It seems that shortly after having crossed the river Euphrates, caravans could branch off from the main route leading to central Anatolia and Kanesh and instead head north along a track called the *sukinnu* road. This would eventually lead to one of the most important commercial centres, the city Durhumit, which was the main market in copper, where the Assyrians bought very large quantities in order to bring the metal to the third major centre, a city called Purushaddum. By taking this route the caravans could clearly avoid not only Kanesh but most of the other cities where they would have to pay taxes. The downside was that the road would take them through areas that were often dangerous. So it was a gamble that probably mostly paid off, but we do learn that even very prominent Assyrians could get caught here, and we are also told that at times the Anatolian kings would forget their quarrels and organise effective patrols that could stop and confiscate the caravans. We have a warning letter that gives strict orders:

The king and queen here have written to the road guards concerning smuggling, saying: "Seize anyone you observe carrying textiles and tin in the land, withhold the tin and textiles and lead the criminal to me." Furthermore, they have written to (people on) the *sukinnu* road. Urgent, do not smuggle tin and textiles and do not commit anything to the *sukinnu* road. Urgent, the orders are strict. Do not send anything, for you will regret it.²⁸

The colonial system of the Assyrians was constructed on the foundation of a network of international agreements such as the treaties we happen to have, and the day-to-day practical arrangements that secured smooth transactions and relations between the two groups had been successfully constructed on this basis. Obviously, the flourishing trade was of immense mutual benefit, and the Anatolian kings must have realised how important it was for their own position and the wealth of their society; in the long run it must in fact have had a profound impact on Anatolian society. The second vital element of the system was constituted by the elaborate and efficient legal and governmental institutions built by the Assyrians themselves. That is best understood by way of an analysis of the Kanesh colony.

THE GOVERNMENT OF A COLONY

THE MAIN ADMINISTRATIVE BUREAU IN THE KANESH COLONY WAS called *bēt kārīm*, “the Office of the Colony”. As long as that building has not been found, we must accept that we lack the textual basis for a proper description of the way in which the colony was administered and governed. Most probably this office was set up as a local version of the Office of the Eponym in Assur, and it must have had a variety of functions essential for the proper working of economic, judicial and governmental affairs. However, in the absence of the archives of this office – which will probably appear one day – we have to build our understanding on texts of other types, coming from other contexts.

The daily functioning of the Kanesh colony is in fact illuminated by hundreds of primarily judicial documents; they refer to its various activities, such as the appointment or certification of witnesses or the issuing of verdicts in concrete cases, but although numerous, these texts usually limit themselves to certain standardised phrases and provide little information concerning the actual practices of the men who act. We are told, for instance, that “PN seized us against PN₂ and PN said as follows to PN₂” – after which follows the statements of both involved parties; the text ends with the formula: “The Kanesh colony gave us to witness these statements, and we gave our testimony before divine Assur’s dagger. Witnessed by PN₃, PN₄, and PN₅.”¹

Clearly, the text is formulated from the point of view of the witnesses, the men who were “given” by the colony and “seized” by the plaintiff; they are the ones who speak. The point of such a case of private summons is to record in written, legally binding form a claim and a response to such a claim. In many instances the plaintiff receives an acknowledgement of the claim and a promise to take care of it, but equally often he meets with denial, opposition or outright hostility. The sad fact is that such documents tell us little about the direct involvement of the colony – how were men chosen to

be witnesses, and how were officials involved in the drawing up of the final document? It was presumably written by the person known as the “scribe of the colony” who must have been present during the negotiations, and he may well have been the one who had to cut down what would presumably sometimes have been lengthy oral encounters to a few centrally important sentences. He would probably also have formally organised the oath-taking ceremony of the witnesses in the sacred “Gate of the God”. Letters can often provide more detail about the actual events, but these judicial documents are of limited value for a more precise understanding of the way in which the colony was structured. For information about how it acted and reached decisions, we have to turn to three rather miserable fragments of tablets that once, when complete, contained a kind of constitution for the colony, usually referred to as the Statutes of the Kanesh colony.

They were among the first tablets to be published, and one wonders from which context they came; since they contain rules for the proper conduct of negotiations and decision-making in the assemblies of the colony, it is a reasonable assumption that they were found in an official building, perhaps the long-sought-after “Office of the Colony”. On the other hand, many other official documents – treaties, letters from the king and city assembly – have been discovered in private buildings among the merchant archives.

One of these three texts, a fragment of a very large tablet now in the Louvre has the title *tašīmtum*, a noun derived from a verb meaning “to reflect, deliberate”. Persons who do not possess *tašīmtum* act stupidly and have no sense or judgment, so there is clearly a nuance of reason and even wisdom in the noun. With that in mind we may perhaps translate it “law” or “decree”. The two remaining tablets have no heading; on the second one the first lines are completely broken away, whereas the third one is a poor fragment with no more than seven damaged lines. It is obvious, in other words, that what we have is only a small part of what was once a detailed and elaborate set of rules.

The many documents of practice mentioned earlier show that the Assyrian population of the colony was divided into two groups, the “big men” and the “small men”. Witnesses are sometimes said to be “given” by “the Kanesh colony, small and big”, and decisions such as legal judgments use the same terminology. It is not entirely clear what made a person “big” in these contexts, but it is worth noticing that the statute texts also speak of “men with accounts”,² that is, persons who because of their annual payments to the Office of the Colony formed a kind of elite group of merchants, and it is likely that this designates men who are otherwise said to be “big”.

The first statute text shows us that this distinction in rank was institutionalised in two different organs, a council of big men and a plenary assembly of both big and small. The text is concerned with the question of the relationship between these two bodies, specifically when and under which circumstances a plenary meeting should be called.

[T]hey investigate their case, and if it is a matter of convening the plenary assembly, they so order the scribe in their council, and the scribe convenes the plenary assembly. Without the consent of a majority of the big men, a single man with an account cannot order the scribe to convene the plenary assembly. If the scribe convenes the plenary assembly without the consent of the big men, at the request of a single person, the scribe will have to pay a fine of 10 shekels of silver.

No one among the small men must approach a man with an account or keep lurking in the gate of the colony with a complaint. If someone does lurk in the gate of the colony with a complaint ...³

This fragment is concerned with the function of the council of big men and the scribe, who appears to have been a salaried bureaucrat in charge of the practical organisation of the colony. Since most adult merchants in Anatolia were literate, the title “scribe” in this society was used to refer to such officials; the practical duties assigned to them are further illuminated by the other statute texts.

The rule set out in the first text shows that the council possessed the right to decide whether or not to call a meeting of the plenary assembly, a situation paralleled by the constitution of classical Athens, where we find a system called *probouleuma*. Here we have a bicameral system with a council, *boulē*, and a plenary assembly *ekklesia*, and the rule in question ensured that this latter body could be convened only by a decision taken by the *boulē*. This allowed the council to make important negative decisions by the simple expedient of deciding not to submit a question to the people.⁴ It is not clear to me whether this was a serious concern in the colony at Kanesh, for the rule seems more preoccupied with conflicts within the council than with its power over the rest of the Assyrian population. Nevertheless, we can glimpse behind this decree some of the possible disagreements and difficulties that must have marked the daily life of the merchants, where conflicts of interest could make life very difficult for them.

Even though this is rarely apparent in the letters, it cannot have been unusual for a less privileged member of the colony to have his personal interests set aside by the more important men. A clear example is found in the correspondence of a man called Ali-ahum, the son of Shalim-Assur and

the younger brother of Ennam-Assur. As will be discussed later, this older brother had been murdered and robbed in a place called Tawniya in the country north of Kanesh, and Ali-ahum engaged in a long and apparently futile struggle to obtain blood money from the guilty party.

At first the Kanesh colony supported his attempt to get the king of Tawniya to search for and apprehend the murderer, but he was unwilling to become involved, so the delegation from the colony returned empty-handed. Ali-ahum then continued his fight by concentrating on a certain Itur-ili, a man who had for many years been collaborating with members of the Shalim-Assur family and who had been involved in the business with Ennam-Assur that led to his death. In Ali-ahum's view he was responsible for the lost money, but there really is no reason to think that he was the suspected murderer. Ali-ahum pursued this matter in Kanesh, but it was all to no avail, as we read in a letter he sent together with a trusted partner to his sister in Assur; they urge her to approach the assembly in the capital to present their case. The aim would be to obtain a letter from the City and the appointment of an attorney, who could come to Kanesh in order to help them in their fight with Itur-ili. In a revealing passage the writers explain that they had completely exhausted their possibilities for gaining a proper hearing in Kanesh:

It is now three years since Ennam-Assur died. Here Itur-ili blocks the gate of the colony like a lion, and we are powerless and cannot set witnesses for the man. We are alone, so we cannot fulfil our obligation toward the man. We are waiting for a letter from the City and an attorney.⁵

Somewhat later Ali-ahum returns to the matter in a new letter to his sister:

The colony supports him. He will take the colony as his witness. If indeed he has the big men as his witnesses, then what can I say?⁶

Ali-ahum had clearly not inherited the status of his dead father Shalim-Assur, for in this affair he is one of those "small men" who are referred to as lurking in the gate of the colony, trying to gain the ear and support of the powerful "big men" in the council. In such a situation he can only hope to persuade the even more influential men in the city assembly in Assur to accept responsibility for the case, obviously assuming that this body will be less prone to submit to the influence of men in Kanesh.

The second statute text is also concerned with decisions in the council and the plenary assembly, but it is a much more technical set of rules, giving instructions about the proper procedures for voting and the practical role of the scribe. It is unfortunately very poorly preserved, but the understandable parts of the text are as follows:

Decree:

The scribe will divide ... into three groups, and they will give a verdict....

When they stand the scribe will divide them into three groups, and they will resolve the matter. In case they do not resolve the matter the plenary assembly will convene; the scribe will divide them into seven groups and they will resolve the matter by a majority decision.⁷

It is not clear which group is meant in the first sentence, but it is possible we should read the word “merchants”. It is not the term for the council. It is likewise not clear what significance there is in the difference in terminology: “give a verdict” as opposed to “resolve the matter”. If the group first mentioned was identical with the council, it seems that the decision to call the plenary assembly was an automatic one, dependent on whether or not they could reach a decision. There are also broken passages in the rest of the text that speak of someone “sitting”, probably in contrast to the reference to other persons “standing”, but the significance of this distinction cannot be ascertained. What we can say, however, is that the rules governing decision-making in the various bodies governing the affairs of the colony were detailed and elaborate.

It is also remarkable that the regulations directly refer to decisions taken by a majority. This is apparently regarded as the last resort, for first a group of unknown composition divided into three subgroups has to try to find a solution; only if that proves impossible will the plenary assembly be called, divided into seven subgroups (presumably because this body consisted of many more persons), and then a result will be reached by majority. In many traditional societies where groups meet to resolve a problem, the deliberations are supposed to end in a unanimous decision, and negotiations will continue until that becomes possible, since votes and majority resolutions are shunned because only consensus can restore order without leaving any person or group as the clear loser. The restoration of social harmony is the primary goal. This was clearly not a realistic aim for the Old Assyrian merchant society.

Many meetings of litigants before witnesses were regulated by verdicts issued by the city assembly in Assur, and there would therefore be both a letter from that body and the presence of an “attorney” who would conduct the case. In some instances the texts stipulate that the colony is to be “the executive power of the attorney”, with the term *emūqum*, which means “power” or “force”. We do not have texts that clearly inform us about how this was effected.

The distinction between “big” and “small” men was obviously highly significant, and it must have been based on simple, easily recognised criteria,

but what these were is not entirely clear. It is unlikely to have been just a matter of age differential, young and old or junior and senior, even though these translations have been suggested for the terms in question. As mentioned earlier, I have chosen to follow the suggestion made by Veenhof and Dercksen, that the big men were the same as “the men with an account” and that they may be furthermore identified with a group of men referred to as “fee-payers”. However, a precise explanation of what this expression involved is beyond reach at the moment.⁸

It is clear, though, that some traders did have an account in the Office of the Colony, and they made payments into it at certain times when the officials in charge gave permission. This is almost certainly part of the complex and poorly understood practices referred to as the payment of “fees”. The word in question, *dātum*, is used in two different contexts, being, on the one hand, the term for the various small and large payments made en route from Assur to Kanesh by the caravans, the “fees” paid to inns, officials and so on; the word also refers to often substantial payments to the Office of the Colony by individual merchants, who then became “fee payers” (*šāqil dātīm*). This in turn conferred certain privileges on these persons, one of them presumably their status as “big men” in the colonial society; we also know that they were exempt from the payment of a special tax, “the *šaddu’utum* of the Kanesh colony,” which was otherwise levied on all caravans by the Office of the Colony. We do not know with certainty at what rate this tax was levied, but it may have been 5 percent.⁹ There must have been other advantages involved in the payment of fees, but we cannot at the moment describe these.

The “fee payers” did not all live in Kanesh, for this position was open to traders in Assur as well. Presumably the men in the capital who chose to pay the fees in Kanesh did so because they had agents and representatives there, most often sons who were charged with the running of the Anatolian branch of the family’s affairs. In some cases these “absentees” could have lived in Kanesh as young men and had an account from that earlier time. Our old friend Assur-idi paid such fees and had an account in the Office of the Colony, but he seems to have been operating on the margins of his economic capability and consequently found the fees to be too much for him. In a letter to his representatives in Kanesh, he asks them to approach the colony officials and ask for clemency, so he will be allowed to pay at a lower rate than normal:

If they do not agree with you, then implore them to allow me to stand for only half a share of a man. Are you not aware which have been my

deposits? Should I make a further deposit on top of that? I have already paid 37 pounds on the account. Do me this favour. Take care so I may stand for half a share of a man.¹⁰

Loss of status would surely have been extremely unpleasant for those merchants who found that they were unable to meet the requirements of the Office of the Colony, but it is not clear what it would mean to be only half a man.

The amounts mentioned in connection with the payment of fees to the Kanesh colony are generally very substantial, ranging from 12 to 27 pounds of silver. Not all of these amounts (e.g., the 37 pounds mentioned by Assur-idi) necessarily correspond to an annual contribution, but the size of the payments indicates both that only very wealthy individuals could take part and that they must have gained substantial advantages by doing so.

What these large amounts were used for is not at all clear. Dercksen suggests that communally organised commercial ventures were based on such deposits, and he has analysed a number of documents that refer to “the company of PN”, *ellat PN*. His thesis is that at least a portion of the fees paid to the Office of the Colony was invested in communal commercial ventures, especially those concerned with the trade in wool. The direct involvement of the Office of the Colony in these affairs is only poorly attested, however, which may be a consequence of the failure to find this building, and the connection with the payment of fees remains to be documented. Moreover, the one clearly attested case of such a trade in wool which involved many merchants in a kind of partnership, the example of the wool of Ushinalam from the archive of the Shalim-Assur family, appears to have been carried out without any involvement of the Office of the Colony. Dercksen’s thesis provides us with a partial explanation of the very large payments made, of why they would have been seen as advantageous by men both in Anatolia and in Assur, but there are many unclear aspects of the functioning of this institution.¹¹

The letter already quoted from the *nibum* to the Kanesh colony concerning the payment for walls in Assur shows that the Kanesh colony as a corporate body had funds stored in the capital, but we do not know for what purpose. The many financial and commercial transactions that can be seen to have happened in the Office makes it truly remarkable that we are completely uninformed about the persons who were in charge of its daily affairs. Perhaps we have to envisage a situation where the big men took all such decisions, leaving it to the scribe to carry them out. When and if the building itself is found and excavated we shall undoubtedly have to revise our current understanding of the office, its function and its staff.

We have no information about where the plenary assembly held its meetings, but the potential size of this body, surely on occasion around a hundred men, indicates that there must have been a specially designated spot for its activities. The council of big men appears to have met in or near the Office of the Colony, where the gate of the colony was presumably located.¹² It is impossible to determine how many members it would have had, but from one of the other significant colonies in Anatolia, in the important city Purushaddum, we have evidence of a group of fifteen men taking serious decisions; at one point such a group “sat in the council in the Purushaddum colony” and imposed an embargo on a certain high Anatolian official.¹³ It is possible that the Anatolian in question was the crown prince, so the embargo imposed on trade with him by the Assyrian community indicates the seriousness of the situation. This was clearly an occasion where the merchants had to come together and where the leading men in the colony were obliged to take action.

Remarkably we have another such text in which fifteen named individuals are said to function in the council in the Office of the Colony; this time they are said to “stand”, apparently in order to witness a real estate transaction involving two Assyrians. This document records a situation that took place in Kanesh, and it is late, probably from the first decade of the level 1b period, and the fact that we have the same number of persons appearing in both texts may in fact be accidental.¹⁴

There are few references to situations where the colonial institutions took decisions of a quasi-political nature, and they seem to have their roots in commercial and legal conflicts between an Assyrian merchant and members of the Anatolian aristocracy. By far the majority of the matters brought before the councils and assemblies in the colonies were of a judicial nature.

One can easily get the impression that the Old Assyrians were particularly litigious, for we have preserved a very large number of texts that reflect or refer to lawsuits. In his elaborate study of the legal procedures in this society, Thomas Hertel refers to no fewer than 463 texts that are classified as “testimonies”, that is, documents which record statements before witnesses; in the private archive of the Shalim-Assur family discovered in their house in 1994, no less than a third of all texts are said to be relevant to the study of dispute processing.¹⁵ And this family was hardly more combative than most. We have in the available corpus nineteen verdicts issued by the city assembly in Assur, eighty-two by various colonial authorities and twenty-nine said to have been handed down by named, appointed judges. Thomas Hertel informs me that in his estimate all known verdicts of the city assembly represent about fifty different legal cases.¹⁶

In each instance a conflict had arisen between two or more persons, and the fact that a document was set up indicates that the various colonial institutions became involved. Councils and assemblies were presumably directly implicated in very few private disputes, but the Office of the Colony must have played a central part in the daily judicial activities.

This office was the administrative centre of the colony, but unfortunately we are quite poorly informed about the activities that took place here. As already mentioned, we are not even certain about the identity of the persons who were in charge. In parallel with the situation in the capital, where the *limmum* is known to have directed the affairs of City Hall, it would be logical to assume that the men who gave their names to the weeks in Anatolia, referred to as *hamuštum*, had a corresponding role in the affairs of the Office of the Colony. The term itself creates problems, for it should mean “one-fifth”, but if that is so, we have no real idea about what it was one-fifth of. Speculations have been offered several times, but sadly we have no hard facts to inform us. The most convincing estimate of what a week really was, based on statistics, is seven days – which does not explain the term *hamuštum*.¹⁷ In the early phase of level 2 we always find two persons functioning together as week eponyms, but around the time of the collapse of our documentation a reform was instituted so that only one person had this office.

Moreover, there is very little evidence to point to an administrative role for the holders of the week eponymy, so one wonders who was in fact in charge of the Office of the Colony. Intriguingly, we have a few texts which refer to the colony as an economic or legal person, owing money or receiving payments; in those cases we find that one, two or three individuals act on behalf of the colony, and in that capacity they are referred to by the term *limmum*, the designation used for the year eponyms in Assur. Some confusion was caused by these texts until it was understood that the men acting in them operated in Kanesh and had nothing to do with the institution of the year eponymy in Assur. This word must therefore refer to the right of individuals to act on behalf of the community, but these references are rare and provide no more than glimpses of the administrative procedures involved in the running of the colony. Dercksen has suggested that the colony *limmus* served for a certain term (of days, weeks or perhaps months) in an administrative capacity.¹⁸

The Office of the Colony was deeply involved in regular contacts with the local palace. Arrangements concerning the payment of taxes often included balance payments, when fractions of a textile became involved for instance, and it seems that such payments went through the office. But other relations

with the palace would also have been carried out through the colonial institutions. One of the most dramatic encounters between palace and colony is described in a text that tells us that an Assyrian merchant has been arrested and put in jail by the palace, suspected of having spied on behalf of another, hostile Anatolian kingdom:

Two months after the palace arrested Assur-taklaku the colony went up to the palace and said as follows to the king and queen: "The man has committed no crime or offense. Free the man, for together with us he has a house here, and together with us he will abide by your wishes."

The royal couple expressed their willingness to release him, provided the colony would give them the person who had sent a letter from a kingdom called Tawniya, which the unfortunate Assur-taklaku had brought to the city where this took place. They claimed that this letter showed that the writer was a supporter of Tawniya and sought the head of the king. The colony engaged in further negotiations, but it seems that the king and queen did not relent, despite the offer of the representative of the colony to take an oath to prove that their colleague was innocent of the charges.¹⁹

A somewhat similar situation is referred to in connection with the futile search for blood money by Ali-ahum, discussed earlier in this chapter; here a delegation from the Kanesh colony went to Tawniya to try to persuade the king there to make an effort to secure the payment of blood money.

To what extent the Kanesh colony was directly involved in the negotiations with local kings concerning the renewal of the treaties existing between them is not entirely clear. The somewhat nebulous "envoys of the City" who are mentioned as present in Kanesh were clearly active in this field, and several letters about such diplomatic affairs were addressed to the envoys of the City and the Kanesh colony.²⁰ We do not know whether such envoys were always present in Anatolia or whether they were sent out to deal with problems that arose, but the first alternative is more likely.

Part IV

Economy and Society



THE CARAVAN TRADE

IMAGINE OLD ASSUR-IDI ONE MORNING WALKING THROUGH THE NARROW streets in Assur down to the main city gate, leading two loaded donkeys. A large group of men and donkeys are waiting inside the gate, a caravan that is getting ready for the long journey to Anatolia. Heavily loaded donkeys are being checked a last time by their packers to make sure that harnesses and saddlebags are correctly fastened. Officials from the City Hall walk around among the animals to see that the shipments are correctly packed and sealed, noting down whether the obligatory export duty has been paid. Some of the donkey drivers are old and rugged men who have endured the trip and its hardships many times already, others, new young men, nervously try to look more experienced than they are.

Here in the grey light before the sun is up a lot of people are milling around. Some are here to say goodbye to friends or children who will be away for months or years. A young woman is being seen off by her family before going to Kanesh to marry a man she has probably never met. It will take years before she will return to her home in Assur; in fact, she may never come back. Important orders and instructions are being repeated to the donkey drivers, and letters in sealed envelopes are entrusted to a traveller who is supposed to be reliable and will deliver them promptly.

The donkeys stand patiently waiting for the city gate to be opened at sunrise. They are loaded with tin and textiles, each carrying two sealed saddlebags plus a smaller top-pack. The bags with tin contain 65 pounds each, so the total load including the top-pack is about 160 pounds. Bags packed with textiles, wrapped in special cloth that is sometimes waterproof, contain 25–35 pieces, and the total weight is about the same as for the tin loads. The entire caravan consists of some twenty donkeys and an equal number of men, but the shipments belong to several different merchants in Assur who send off a few donkeys each. This is valuable cargo, and the economic

welfare of the owners is entirely dependent on the successful completion of the caravan transaction. The transport must reach Kanesh quickly and without problems, the merchandise must be sold at a reasonable profit and silver must be sent back to Assur.

Assur-idi brought with him to the city gate a shipment of 130 pounds of tin, 30 textiles of a type called *kutānum*, 4 black, waterproof textiles used to wrap the *kutānum* textiles, plus 17 pounds of tin for expenses en route; all this was carried by two donkeys. In a last-minute deal agreed to just before sunrise, he found a man who stood inside the gate with another shipment that he was to bring to Kanesh, a certain Sharrum-Adad, who was willing to take the responsibility also for Assur-idi's consignment. As the transporter explained in a letter to Assur-nada, sent from somewhere en route to Kanesh:

Assur-idi entrusted to me in the city gate when I was about to leave 2 talents, 10 pounds of tin under seal, two black donkeys and some *kutānu* textiles.

He then explained that they had agreed that he should take the textiles out of their packing material when he reached an Assyrian colony, entrust them to an agent and write to Assur-nada how many textiles were involved. He also claimed that since the textiles had been packed before he received them, he did not in fact know how many there were, so he had done nothing.

It seems therefore that in his hurry Assur-idi did not clearly explain to Sharrum-Adad precisely how many textiles were packed in the saddlebags on the donkey's back. The old man knew, of course, precisely how many there were, and the transporter may not have been entirely candid, but in the haste it seems they did not really understand each other.¹

A thousand kilometres away, in central Anatolia, men were waiting for the caravans to arrive. They were usually prepared for it, for letters had been sent ahead with faster transports from Assur, in which the senders had announced the arrival of their goods. These letters also contained detailed instructions telling the men in Kanesh what they were supposed to do with the shipments when they arrived.

Assur-idi had sent such a letter to his son Assur-nada, informing him that three different consignments were on their way. Apart from the shipment entrusted to Sharrum-Adad, which he assumed had already arrived, a man called Shu-Nunu has been given a single donkey loaded with 26 textiles and some tin, and a third man called Kurub-Ishtar was bringing two donkeys with 65 kilos of tin, 35 textiles and a little tin for expenses. These three shipments had apparently been sent off from Assur shortly after each other.

It seems clear that the goods transported by Sharrum-Adad must have been dispatched from Assur before the two other shipments. Unfortunately it is not entirely known how the caravan traffic was organised, whether fairly large groups of people and animals travelled together or whether it was normal to send off just a couple of donkeys whenever it seemed convenient. There is no doubt that this happened frequently, but it is likely that the added security of a larger caravan must have been important, and most caravans would probably have combined a number of individual consignments. From the later period of level 1b we have a reference in a letter from the palace in Mari to an Assyrian caravan consisting of 300 donkeys and an equal number of men travelling through northern Syria,² but whether such large caravans were the norm also in the earlier period is uncertain.

The largest caravan known from the texts regulating caravan procedures in the main period was one organised by the Shalim-Assur family. The shipment carried by thirty-four donkeys consisted of

- 603 *kutānu* textiles, 100 of these of second quality
- 35 extra-fine *kutānu* textiles, 3 of these sealed by Ili-wedaku
- 64 Abarnian textiles
- 20 talents of tin under seal (600 kilos), plus tin for expenses
- 34 donkeys and their harnesses
- 12 further textiles
- 1 talent of scrap metal
- 600 nails
- 25 litres of oil plus 12½ litres of first-class oil
- 22 shekels of carnelian (ca. 175 grams)
- 100 gemstones

The texts further list various poorly preserved items: bronze pins, plane logs, 60 litres of saffron, 30 pounds of cedar fragrance.³ This very substantial caravan is referred to in four different texts, probably an indication of its unusual size and complexity. The texts are unusual also in referring to the many luxury items, gemstones, oil and perfumes, and we may perhaps assume that such commodities would often have been sent as extras together with the tin and textiles, but we have very few clear references. Shalim-Assur at this moment was in Assur, and his instructions to the men receiving the caravan in Kanesh were detailed and clear. Of the textiles, 181 must be smuggled and deposited in the town Timelkiya; the rest are to be brought to Kanesh, where the goods will be cleared in the palace in the correct way. The packers involved in the caravan are to assist Shalim-Assur's two sons Ennam-Assur and Ali-ahum "on the road to Purushaddum or Durhumit or Tishmurna,

where you can make a profit, so make at least 10 pounds of silver for me and send that as soon as possible to Kanesh. Do not release a single shekel of silver on credit to agents.”

For taxation purposes the value of caravans leaving Assur was computed in tin, using a difficult word, *awītum*, the declared value of a shipment of goods. Caravans from Kanesh to Assur were declared in silver. We have three lists of such values for caravans from Assur, and they refer to very large amounts and to huge caravans. One case concerns a “caravan of Pushu-ken”, and the text informs us that this enterprise was made up of, in all, 74 talents – or 2 tons, 220 kilos – of tin plus 121 textiles, belonging to eight different Assyrians, and if that represented a caravan it would have consisted of at least 35 donkeys.⁴ An even larger shipment, said to be “the declared value of Imdi-ilum’s caravan” consisted of goods reckoned to represent the value of no less than 410 talents, 11 pounds of tin, or more than 12 tons. The individual posts, ranging from 47 talents (1,410 kilos) belonging to Imdi-ilum himself to about 55 pounds, belonged to a large number of individuals. If this was indeed a single caravan arranged by the prominent merchant Imdi-ilum, it would have consisted of nearly 200 donkeys.⁵ As pointed out by Veenhof in his comments in the publication of the text, these figures are surprisingly high; he suggests that the list may refer to activities spread over a longer period rather than to one caravan and that it may have to be understood in the framework of the joint-stock company. In contrast, Dercksen suggests that these texts in fact do refer to individual caravans, called *ellutum*, which should be understood as a form of partnership “that could be used for the joint shipment of merchandise and for specific trading opportunities”.⁶

To return to the small consignment sent off by Assur-idi, the letter he sent to his sons Assur-nada and Assur-taklaku to announce the imminent arrival of shipments from Assur lies in a drawer in the British Museum.⁷ It is a typical example of what I have called a “notifying message”, in which the sending of a shipment is announced and orders are given about what to do with the goods once they arrive. In this particular case the instructions are addressed primarily to the younger brother, Assur-taklaku, who is a co-recipient of the letter, and for the first consignment brought by Sharrum-Adad he is ordered to clear the shipment with the palace and then immediately send the estimated value of the goods in silver back to Assur. He is not to wait until the goods have actually been sold. As for the second and third consignments, Assur-nada is ordered to clear the shipments with the palace, and once taxes have been paid he must hand them over to the younger brother, who will bring them to the important city Purushaddum. He is obviously to sell the tin and textiles there, but also in this case speed is vital:

If Assur-taklaku is not there, then send it to him where he is. Send me a letter about how many goods were cleared, and say to Assur-taklaku that he should not stay long in the colony in Purushaddum. He must not stay more than ten days after he has arrived.

In most cases the transporter, both in the overland trade and within Anatolia, would be either a member of the family or a close associate, so the risk of misunderstandings as in the case of Sharrum-Adad would be minimal. There can be no doubt that in this instance there would have been a delay and consequently a loss of money, for when Sharrum-Adad wrote his letter to Assur-nada he was still en route and had not arrived at Kanesh. He was probably a seasoned traveller who had simply run into trouble; it was not unusual for young men to start their career in the family business as caravan leaders, but in most cases we hear of transporters who had taken the trip many times, experienced men who knew how to deal with the many small and large problems that were bound to come up and men who knew the fastest and safest roads.

The routes available to the Assyrian caravans are fairly well known. The first long stretch from Assur leads towards the north-west into the ocean of the Syrian steppe, a rich agricultural land with many towns and small kingdoms. More than 400 kilometres to the west awaited the great river Euphrates, which crossed the Taurus Mountains and descended from the Anatolian highlands to the north Syrian plains through a series of narrow gorges. Before that mighty obstacle was reached, roughly halfway there the caravans came to the rich lands in the Habur river system. The caravans would have had a choice of several routes, and it is not possible to point to a firmly established itinerary.⁸ Along the way they could make use of a series of inns, where they would have a roof over their heads and the animals would get fodder and water. Certain important cities appear regularly in the accounts, places that apparently could not be avoided and where the caravan leaders had to make small payments to local officials. For this purpose the packers received an amount in tin before departure from Assur.

The distance from Assur to Kanesh is about 750 kilometres as the crow flies, but in reality the trip would have been ca. 1,000–1,100 kilometres, roughly the distance between Washington, DC, and Chicago or between Paris and Barcelona. Modern travellers making use of cars and motorways can manage such distances in about twelve hours, but four thousand years ago when the trip was on foot on questionable roads the possible speed was rather different. Roman roads were usually constructed with *mansiones*, a kind of roadside inn, every 25–30 kilometres,⁹ and even today in many

areas in Europe towns are located at distances of ca. 30 kilometres from each other, a distance that also in the Bronze Age would have been a day's journey. Studies of caravans in the Near East in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries give the same result: one travels at the speed of 5 kilometres per hour, six hours a day. Loading and unloading the animals is time-consuming, and they have to be watered and fed, so a working day can easily be long, even if the caravan travels no more than about 30 kilometres. A normal caravan must accordingly have taken some six weeks to get from Assur to Kanesh.

It was certainly possible to travel faster than that,¹⁰ and it is clear from the correspondence that the merchants often expressed a desire for the utmost speed. Time and again we are informed that goods or letters were to be dispatched with the very first transport available, and quite often travellers were told not to spend a single night once they had arrived at their destination – they must leave again immediately. Many letters refer to shipments called *bātiqum*, which must be express caravans; the word is derived from a verb that means “to tear up (tent poles)”.¹¹ It is also clear that in many instances letters travelled faster than ordinary caravans. A merchant in urgent need of money would often ask the recipient in Kanesh not to wait for the arrival of the caravan that had been sent off from Assur, but to send silver at once upon reading the letter, usually an amount that would correspond to the anticipated value of the shipment. That can only mean that the letter was expected to arrive much faster than the caravan.

The journey itself must have been physically exhausting, even for hardened travellers, especially during the height of summer, when the heat on the endless steppes often must have made movement during the middle of the day very difficult. Sunstroke was a constant danger for those who did not take the necessary precautions. The caravans that followed the same routes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also faced serious problems from the Bedouin, who posed a constant threat of robbery and attack. That seems not to have been a serious concern for the Old Assyrian caravans, however, and we never read of payments to guards following the shipments. Obviously, the caravan personnel would have been armed, but swords and knives seem to have served more mundane purposes. The degree of security on the roads was a result of the agreements reached with the local kings, and it was obviously a precondition for the effective conduct of such long-distance trade during a period of more than two hundred years that the areas in which the caravans travelled had a stable and well-organised political system. Only rarely do we read of robbery, but it must nevertheless have been a constant concern for the travellers. That stolen goods were to be restored in accordance with the treaties would have been of little interest if you were

dead. Everybody must have known stories about someone whose trip ended badly, who did not reach his destination. And some would have known the words of an incantation that dealt with dangers of a different kind:

Blood, oh bloody! The black dog lurks on a mound, waiting for the scattered caravan, looking out for a good man.¹²

The text continues with a plea to the gods for protection, and one wonders whether this is a wolf or something much more terrible, a demon in the shape of a huge black dog, lurking on a hill along the road, ready to pounce on a traveller who has become separated from his fellows. One could sacrifice a sheep to the gods and recite the incantation in order to safeguard against such horrible threats. Sacrifices were offered to the gods before every new trip, and sometimes a sheep would be killed at certain dangerous places such as the crossing of a major river.¹³

The physical effort involved in passing across the steppe in Syria and south-eastern Turkey was tough, with river crossings and endless plains, but the real difficulties lay ahead. Having reached the region around modern Şanlıurfa in southern Turkey, one faced a major decision: which of two possible routes to take. Continuing towards the west one would eventually reach the Euphrates, which had to be crossed by ferry, and after the crossing the road went north into the high Taurus Mountains. The main station on this route was a city called Mamma, located in the region around modern Kahramanmaraş. From here narrow roads take one through a series of passes and through the massif of the Taurus up onto the Anatolian plateau (Figure 25).

The other, more commonly used route went north in order to reach the Euphrates before it rushed down from the mountains. Near a city called Hahhum it would be crossed by ferry (as we read in the treaty with the rulers of Hahhum). The entire area here is now under water because of the building of the Atatürk Dam, and the ancient roads can no longer be followed. But here too walls of mountains rose above the travellers before they reached the Elbistan plain, where a major Assyrian colony was located (Figure 26). From there one had to travel through narrow valleys and some mountain passes before arriving at Kanesh.

The difficulties involved in crossing the Taurus were not really comparable to those faced by the Italian merchants of the Renaissance who had to cross the Alps, but the hardship was nevertheless very real. In many places the ancient roads can still be seen deep down in the narrow valleys, whereas the modern paved roads have been cut into the mountainside high above. The peaks around the caravans rose to a height of between 3 and 3½ kilometres.



25. One of the roads through the Taurus Mountains, the Hurmen Su valley. Photo MTL.



26. The large fertile Elbistan plain. Photo MTL

The Taurus was thus a barrier that challenged the strongest and most fearless travellers, and the donkey caravans cannot have moved very fast. It seems that there were very few, scattered villages in these valleys, so it is unlikely that the caravans could spend their nights in the comfort of a warm house. Between the first week of December and early April, the roads were often closed

because of cold and snow, and it was no joke to be caught there because of bad weather. One might have to wait weeks or even months for a chance to move on. That must have happened to some unlucky or foolhardy travellers who tried to get through at times other than the regular season; we read occasionally of such situations, but in many instances it was probably not even possible to send off a messenger with a letter to explain where one was and ask for help or money.

Assur-nada wrote once to his Anatolian wife to explain a similar situation:

I wrote to you saying that I would write to you again at the beginning of spring, so you could come here. Do not be angry with me – winter caught up with us, so that the cash I was expecting to collect became outstanding claims, and that is why I did not write to you.¹⁴

Even in the middle of the mountains the caravans could choose from a number of routes, but most of them continued to Kanesh along the most direct track. Having crossed safely over the last pass, they followed the road across the typical Anatolian plateau, with rolling hills and large open valleys, and one day the men could finally look out over the Kanesh plain, a sharply delimited green oasis where the final goal of the journey lay – the palaces on the large mound and the lower town, where family, friends and bosses were waiting anxiously for the arrival of the donkeys with their wares and the men with their accounts of the journey and news and letters from Assur.

However, it was not unusual for the caravans to take a different route from the Elbistan plain, northwards across a rougher landscape that appears to have been less densely populated. This road was often used for smuggling, since it allowed the caravans to avoid the large cities where taxes would have been paid. It must have been a somewhat risky route that at some point took the caravans across what is now called the Uzunyayla, a sparsely populated region of mountain pasture where protection from armed guards did not exist. The end point of this route was the important commercial centre called Durhumit, probably located in the area around modern Merzifon, the main market in Anatolia for the purchase of copper. Since the Assyrians in the course of their commercial penetration of Anatolia developed a lucrative trade in copper within the borders of the region, this city appears to have achieved a growing importance. In fact, some traders like Shalim-Assur chose to leave the lower town at Kanesh and settle permanently in Durhumit, where they could organise the purchase, refining and shipment of copper. Many of Shalim-Assur's caravans from Assur therefore bypassed Kanesh and went straight to Durhumit.

Once the caravan stood on the last hill looking out over the fertile Kanesh plain, the men must have felt a mixture of relief and expectation. On the

plain the mound stood as a small mountain looming over the lower town and the fields around. The great palace in the centre of the mound could be seen clearly and sent an unequivocal message of power and wealth. Around the lower town and on top of the mound ran walls with a few guarded gates.

When the caravan had come through the gate to the lower town, it was immediately taken to the palace on the mound in order for the goods to be cleared through customs. The caravan staff was undoubtedly met and assisted by men from the interested merchant houses in the lower town, where the goods were to be delivered. In the case of Sharrum-Adad, when he eventually reached Kanesh, it would have been Assur-nada, the son who was in charge of the family's affairs in Anatolia. The procedures in the palace could become rather complex, even though the basic rules for taxation and pre-emption were quite simple and were precisely formulated in the treaty with the local king.

The palace officials opened the shipments in order to decide how much tax had to be paid. I have already discussed the basic elements of the taxation system, where the most important payment, the *nishātum*, amounted to $3/60$ on the imported textiles; we may say "5 percent", and in fact in some cases the Assyrians referred to the tax with that expression (*mētum hamšat*), but the Mesopotamian mathematical system was based on the figure 60. In many cases the calculation of this tax resulted in a fractional number of textiles, and the officials would then have to compute the value of the fraction on the basis of the market price. In some cases a balance amount would then have to be paid by the transporter; in others the palace took all of the pieces and would then pay the balance through the Office of the Colony. For tin the tax was 2 pounds per bag, and a standard bag weighed 65 pounds.

According to the treaties that existed during level 2, the palace also had the right to buy up to 10 percent of the textiles in the caravan at a reasonable price in a system of pre-emption. It seems that the palace often insisted on this right, and it is probable that the king used the fine textiles as gifts for his officials and allies. It is likely that it was also an active participant in the commerce on the market in Kanesh. Once the transactions in the palace had been concluded, the transporter could finally lead his donkeys down into the lower town, into Assur-nada's house.

The shipment was now checked and weighed. The transporter had to render account of his expenses on the trip, and a detailed letter enumerating expenses and the proceeds from the sale would be drawn up and sent back to Assur-idi in Assur. As we know, an order had already arrived from him, asking that an amount in silver corresponding to the value of the shipment brought by Sharrum-Adad be sent back before the goods were actually sold.

Goods arriving at Kanesh were routinely treated in two different ways. In situations where the men in Assur were in urgent need of cash, they would insist on a direct sale on the market, often after the goods had been taken to Purushaddum. A certain Husarum wrote to Pushu-ken:

When the goods come down from the palace, Shu-Kubum (the transporter) must not be delayed a single day, but let him bring my goods into Purushaddum to your representatives and Assur-tab, Ali-ahum's son, and have them sell my goods for cash on delivery at what price they can get. Give instructions that they must not release the goods on credit to an agent!¹⁵

Some writers are even more insistent, ordering that "until the silver has entered, you must not hand over the tin and textiles! Let the silver be delivered, and only then can the tin and the textiles leave your hands!"¹⁶ This procedure was preferred by some merchants, with Imdi-ilum as a prominent example, and it was clearly meant to ensure a rapid turnover, where the merchant in Assur would get his money quickly. In some instances there could be a special reason for the rush: Imdi-ilum writes after having given instructions for a cash sale:

I have built a house here, and I have spent the 10 pounds of silver I had in my possession. I have no funds available.¹⁷

Sale for cash would presumably have been carried out in a marketplace; the market in Kanesh has not been located, but there are several small squares in the lower town where commercial activities could have taken place; as mentioned earlier, the market of Kanesh could perhaps have been located on the mound, where there was a very large paved square during the period of level 2. This might also be related to the fact that there was a special royal official who was in charge of the market, *rabi mahirim*, so some form of regulation and control must have existed.

Whereas some merchants in Assur were insistent on not giving credit to anyone when their wares were to be sold, others used a different method, a credit sale where a local Assyrian was given either the entire shipment or part of one; the price of the goods and a term for payment were agreed upon, and this meant that the owner of the goods would have to wait a few months before he received his silver, but he could then also negotiate a better price. The credit transaction formulated in a debt note could last between a few weeks and many months, at times as much as seventy weeks – that is, more than a year.¹⁸ If the sale could be finished before the last caravan went back to Assur, so that the boss could get his money within the same caravan

season, it was clearly deemed preferable. As far as we can see it was common for the payment to have to fall within three months, and the trader or credit agent would then have the opportunity to travel around Anatolia, peddling his wares in the many towns where a good bargain could be had. It appears that the agents who accepted such assignments had to pay ca. 50 percent more than the usual market price in Kanesh, which made this procedure very attractive to all. Clearly, there was a degree of risk involved, and the men in Kanesh were ordered again and again to find a truly trustworthy agent, “one who is as secure as you yourself.”

This procedure is illustrated by a large number of texts, since certain merchants in Assur clearly favoured it. One of these was an important trader called Shalim-ahum, who worked through his Kanesh agent, Pushu-ken. In one text he was instructed to

take the tin and the textiles en bloc and sell the goods (on credit) either on short terms or on long ones, as long as a profit can be assured. Sell it as best you can, and then inform me in a letter about the price in silver and the terms.¹⁹

Similar instruction were given by Shalim-ahum in other letters, and he would often stress the importance of the reliability of the agents who were entrusted with the credit sale; the agent was to be “as reliable as you yourself”, and it was clearly more important to find the right man than to insist on a high profit: “Do not make it too expensive for one or two months!”

In most cases these agents were probably men who already had a relationship to the family whose goods they were to sell, and often they would simply have been family members – as was the case with Assur-idi’s son Assur-taklaku. But our correspondence is full of complaints and recriminations because in fact these credit operations often went wrong. One suspects that all the men in Kanesh had had dealings with an agent who could not, or would not, pay in time, who offered excuses and outright lies when challenged and who sometimes simply tried to disappear for a while. One of the fundamental tasks of the men in Kanesh was to collect these outstanding debts from agents who should in fact have paid weeks or months before. The Assyrian term *ba’abtum*, which refers to such unpaid debts, denoted one of the constant financial strains of the system, and the situation was aggravated by the fact that everybody was moving around all the time. There were clearly many moments when the men in Kanesh were completely in the dark with respect to the whereabouts of their agents. Even if they did know, it could be difficult to deal

appropriately with the matter, for it was obviously necessary to have a trusted representative in whatever town the credit agent was visiting, a man who could bring him before witnesses and make him declare his intentions; such representatives would not, of course, be in possession of the original debt note, so the agent could get away with a simple denial or a false explanation.

Trust was therefore a fundamentally important part of such a system, and despite the many problems we read about in the letters, we may assume that in most instances the transaction went smoothly. We learn of all the cases where something went wrong, but if all was well there was no need to write about it. The documentation does provide a vivid picture of a commercial and judicial practice that made considerable demands on people's honesty, one that could be abused by unscrupulous men. One is reminded of the Arabic saying "Love each other, but make accounts with each other." Even when everything went without problems, one consequence of the system was that the merchant in Kanesh usually had so many individual affairs going on at the same time that he had in fact placed most of his assets in the hands of others, and the lack of a fully developed bookkeeping system meant that he would have had only a fairly hazy idea of the actual state of his business and finances.

This was not a unique situation, for similar observations can be made about the early medieval trade from Italy. As pointed out by Crosby, the evidence from the vast Datini archive in Florence shows the difference between a bookkeeping system before and after the invention and application of double-entry practices:

We have a continuous set of the books of Datini from 1366 to 1410, and they are all in narrative form before 1383. A reader or auditor can learn a good deal about the Datini business from them prior to 1383. But the most important bit of information – was the business, at a particular moment, solvent or not? – is difficult to discern.

When the Datini firm began to use double-entry bookkeeping in 1383, this new practice "enabled European merchants ... to achieve comprehension and, thereby, control of the moiling multitude of details of their economic life".²⁰

It is very likely that we tend to underestimate the complexity of Old Assyrian bookkeeping systems, primarily because most of the relevant procedures and documents were either created in or sent to Assur. The fairly common long lists of loans, debts and similar transactions, repeating the text of the original contracts in more or less abbreviated form, have never

been studied in depth. Many of them end with the note “Copies of certified documents; they went overland”, indicating that the original tablets had been sent to Assur to be used in a settling of accounts.²¹ The memorandum must have been set up in Kanesh to serve as a reminder of the many individual transactions as part of archival maintenance. In Assur the documents would have served as the basis for the creation of an overall account of the activities of the agents active in Anatolia. Unfortunately, it is not possible to re-create the accounting procedures themselves, and it is particularly sad that we have no indication of how the traders managed to keep their various obligations apart from each other: partnership funds, votive offerings to the temples and ordinary, daily transactions involving their own money. The fact that this was done and apparently never created any difficulties in itself indicates that efficient procedures must have been in place.

When I published a study of the caravan procedures in 1967 I attempted to show that the basis for the overland trade was a set of documents that together gave a complete description of these typical transactions. The first type was a transport contract, a document that at least sometimes was set up to regulate the relations between sender and transporter. Obviously, when the transporter was a trusted member of the same family as the sender, it was not necessary to write such a text, and, anyway, the contracts set up in Assur would remain in the archives there and would therefore not be found in Kanesh. The second type was what I called a notifying message, a letter from the sender to the recipients in which they were informed about the shipment, told who was responsible for the transportation and given detailed instructions about the sale or purchase they were supposed to carry out or supervise. The texts of this type found in Kanesh are, of course, in nearly all cases letters sent from Assur, for those dispatched from Kanesh would end up in the archives in the capital. Finally, the texts of the third type were accounts sent from the recipients, letters in which they gave a detailed report of prices, amounts bought, taxes paid and the like. Such texts exist in numbers reflecting the transactions in Assur, but we have practically none that detail the activities in Kanesh and Anatolia, and only a few archive copies exist of reports sent from Kanesh back to the investors or representatives in Assur.

An example of an archive copy of a notifying message sent off from Kanesh refers to a perhaps somewhat atypical case that concerned a certain Enlil-bani and his transporter Kukkulanum. We are told that this man was on his way with 30 pounds of silver plus taxes, sealed both by him and by the transporter, and Enlil-bani continues:

I have stated my claim to the silver. In the office of a merchant here I have formally been noted as the guarantor for Kukkulanum and I have stated my claim to the 30 pounds of silver.

There you should stand by Kukkulanum and let him buy textiles for half the silver and tin for the other half in a way that according to his estimate is profitable for him.

Then seal it with your seals and entrust it to Kukkulanum.

My dear brothers, as I here stated my claim to the silver, so you must state your claim on my behalf there in the city gate before you entrust it to Kukkulanum so he may lead the merchandise to me.²²

These instructions were carried out to the letter, as we know from a caravan report written back to Enlil-bani after the caravan had left Assur.²³ The text explains that the 30 pounds of silver have been duly received and the relevant taxes paid; we also read that when the shipment was weighed in control, it was found that $\frac{2}{3}$ pounds of silver was missing. So with the $29\frac{1}{3}$ pounds of silver the men in Assur have made purchases and paid a variety of expenses and miscellaneous costs.

The letter runs as follows:

Thus speak Pilahaya, Irma-Assur and Mannum-balum-Assur; say to Enlil-bani and Kukkulanum:

Kukkulanum has brought 30 pounds of silver, the import duty added, under your seals. We checked the silver and found that $\frac{2}{3}$ pound of silver was missing.

Specification:

114 *kutānu* textiles – their price in silver: $7\frac{1}{2}$ pounds, $4\frac{1}{4}$ shekels;

2 talents, 15 pounds of sealed tin at the rate $13\frac{1}{4}$ shekels per (shekel);

40 pounds of sealed tin, and a further 8 pounds of sealed tin at the rate 13 shekels per (shekel) – its price in silver: $13\frac{5}{6}$ pounds, 3 minus $\frac{1}{6}$ shekel;

6 black donkeys cost 2 pounds, 8 shekels of silver;

their harness: 16 shekels of silver;

37 pounds of tin for expenses at the rate 13 shekels per (shekel) – its price in silver: $2\frac{5}{6}$ pounds, $2\frac{1}{6}$ shekels;

the working capital of 2 packers: 1 pound of silver;

their clothes: 4 shekels;

we added 7 shekels of silver to Nabi-Suen for his working capital;

$12\frac{1}{2}$ shekels: “additions”;

$2\frac{1}{2}$ shekels for the *sa’utum*;

15 shekels: export duty;

we gave 6 shekels of silver to Assur-malik:

Kukkulanum has taken $\frac{5}{6}$ pound of silver, saying: "If the merchant will not let the silver reach me here, I shall take it out of this silver!"

Except for a few minor obscure points (the undefined "additions" and the unclear term *sa'utum*) the text is straightforward. A note may be necessary about the so-called working capital given to the packers, men who would have assisted Kukkulanum and taken care of the practical arrangements with the animals and the cargo. They were each given half a pound of silver; this payment was called a *be'ulātum*, that is, "what you master, control", hence "working capital", and the money had to be paid back at the end of the period of employment. One can therefore say that the salary consisted of the right to administer this money during the caravan trip, where the packers were expected to invest it and enjoy the profit acquired. Such payments are characteristic of the caravan procedures, but they were also well established in employment contracts, where men could enter into service with families not their own without losing their freedom and becoming slaves.

Such a system places an emphasis on the initiative of the individual. It reminds us of the biblical parable of the entrusted talents,²⁴ in which a master gives 5, 3 and 1 talent to his three servants when he leaves for a long journey. The first two servants "went and traded" and doubled the capital, but the third was afraid and hid the money. The two successful ones got to keep the money and were praised for their diligence, but the third was scolded, lost his talent and was told that he should "have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury". A similar principle was clearly at work in the Old Assyrian society, and we may rest assured that the packers had invested their half pound of silver wisely in textiles before the departure from Assur. These would then be sold in the many towns and villages they would pass through on their way to Kanesh.

Only the packers, the men in charge of the transportation, received such working capital, and other members of the personnel either were slaves who would, of course, not receive any pay, or were men hired for special purposes, for instance guides in difficult and perhaps dangerous terrain, and received a proper wage for their services.

The account contains a number of smaller items that covered what may be called miscellaneous expenses, but summing up the information in the letter we can see that it referred to the following posts:

Purchases:	Silver	
114 <i>kutānu</i> textiles	7½ pounds,	4¼ shekels
3 talents, 3 minas of tin	13⅝ pounds,	2⅝ shekels
6 donkeys	2 pounds,	8 shekels
<i>Investments</i>	23½ pounds,	5½ shekels
Working capitals	1 pound,	7 shekels
Other expenses:		
donkey harness		16 shekels
tin for expenses	2⅝ pounds,	2½ shekels
clothes for packers		4 shekels
miscellaneous		15 shekels
export toll		15 shekels
<i>Expenses</i>	4 pounds,	9⅙ shekels
Non-commercial expenses		
for Assur-malik		6 shekels
for Kukkulanum	⅝ pounds	
Extras	⅝ pounds,	6 shekels
Total spent in Assur	29⅓ pounds,	¼ shekel

The investments amounted to more than two-thirds of the silver brought by Kukkulanum. Expenses made up 12½ per cent of the money, ca. 16 percent if we count the payments to Assur-malik and Kukkulanum. The total is a little higher than what had in fact been received at Assur, but the discrepancy was so small that the representatives chose to forget about it. In fact, since a shekel weighed some 8 grams, one wonders how they managed to deal adequately with amounts as small as one-sixth of a shekel.

What would such a shipment be worth in Kanesh? The *kutānu* had been bought for a price of a little less than 4 shekels a piece, and the standard price for such ordinary textiles in Kanesh would be ca. 10–12 shekels; if the shipment were sold through credit agents, the price would often be higher, somewhere between 15 and 20 shekels a piece. The tin had been bought at the rate 13¼:1 and 13:1. The normal price in Kanesh was 7:1, which means that you would get 1 shekel of silver for just 7 shekels of tin. The value of the shipment sent off from Assur would therefore be between 45 and 50 pounds of silver in Kanesh, giving a profit of more than 50 percent. From this we would have to deduct taxes and other expenses in Kanesh, but an estimated 50 percent profit on such a transaction seems reasonable in view of the other texts on which we can draw. If the sale in Anatolia happened through credit agents, the profit may have been larger, and the whole procedure could have lasted between three and

six months, perhaps even more. So depending on the time of year when the shipment arrived at Kanesh, the silver resulting from the transactions in Anatolia could be sent back to Assur before the snow closed the roads through the Taurus Mountains.

The fundamental feature on which the commercial system rested was the fact that “money”, namely silver, was cheaper in Anatolia than in Assur (and the rest of the Near East as far as we know); this meant that goods bought on the market in Assur could be sold with a considerable profit in Kanesh and the other towns in the region. The many caravan accounts written in Kanesh provide us with reliable information, and they would indeed have been essential for the bosses in Assur, who wanted detailed accounts of how their shipments had been handled en route and especially in the markets in Anatolia.

QUANTITIES AND ORIGINS

FROM THE TEXTS IN ASSUR-IDI'S RECONSTRUCTED ARCHIVE WE KNOW that over the years he sent at least 34 talents, 10 pounds of tin to Kanesh (ca. 1 ton), plus 1,651½ textiles; since some of these goods in fact did not belong to him or members of his family but were merely handled by him, we have to reduce the figures so that his own shipments consisted of approximately 21 talents of tin (630 kilos) and 1,000 textiles. These are the figures that can be found in his letters, and they must certainly be increased in view of the likelihood that a considerable number of texts in his correspondence are no longer in existence, but even if they are doubled we end up with numbers that are quite modest: maybe as much as 1.5 tons of tin and 2,000 textiles over a period of approximately thirty years. The annual commercial activity of his family would amount to no more than the shipment of some 50 kilos of tin and 70 textiles, perhaps three donkey-loads per annum, but we have to remember that the evidence may cover a period shorter than thirty years. If that is anywhere near correct, we must conclude that the situation described by the texts discussed in the preceding chapter, where three separate shipments are mentioned, would have been unusual.

The archive of Elamma to be published by Veenhof contains a number of traditional caravan documents, and these refer to 46 talents of tin (about 1.4 tons) and 1,350 textiles sent to Kanesh. Veenhof estimates that these activities covered "not too many years", but the figures are comparable to those known from Assur-idi.¹

In 1972 Klaas Veenhof published a list of all the merchandise sent to Kanesh known to him at the time, counting the shipments of tin and textiles, and he ended up with the following figures:

14,500 textiles and 27,000 pounds of tin.²

These numbers were excerpted from fewer than 200 texts out of the ca. 3,000 he had available, because he chose only documents which directly illustrated the trade between Assur and Kanesh – that is, texts that formed part of the standardised caravan procedure. In the thousands of letters already available to him, there are many more references to shipments, but it is often difficult to know whether they refer to goods that are also mentioned in caravan texts. Today the Old Assyrian Text Project has in its computers close to 10,000 texts, approximately one-half of these unpublished, whereas some 13,000 more texts are in drawers in the Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi in Ankara, waiting for someone to be allowed to read them. No one has repeated Veenhof's effort to count all references to shipments in the now available texts. In that situation it is virtually impossible to establish a definitive understanding of the volume of the Assyrian trade centred on Anatolia, which means that all our speculations concerning statistics and quantities must be of uncertain validity.³

Assuming that the texts available to Veenhof constituted about 12.5 per cent of the now excavated sample, a simple transfer of his figures to the new corpus would give us ca. 110 tons of tin and 115,000 textiles over a period of thirty years, or nearly 4 tons of tin and ca. 3,800 textiles every year. That would correspond to about 110 donkey-loads of textiles and 55 loads of tin. Those figures would seem to represent a minimum, disregarding the texts which have disappeared as well as those that still have not been excavated, so the figures could easily be doubled without much danger of error. On the basis of different calculations, others have reached much larger figures, but even the conservative estimate presented here indicates that we are dealing with a commercial system of very considerable magnitude.

The texts in the reconstructed Assur-idi dossier refer to shipments of ca. 40 kilos of silver back to Assur, underlining the suspicion that this family was really a minor player in the commercial system. Veenhof calculated that the Assur purchase value in silver of the shipments in his list would be ca. 52 talents, or more than 1.5 tons; my revised estimate on the basis of the much larger database available and the number of still unread texts in the museum in Ankara is closer to 12.5 tons of silver, ca. 400 kilos every year. But that gives us a figure for the value of the shipments in Assur before leaving for Kanesh, so the amount of silver sent back would obviously be higher after the goods had been sold and taxes and other expenses deducted, and I would suggest that the total would probably be around 18 tons, or 600 kilos, of silver per annum as a minimum.

Assuming that the average price of a textile sold in Anatolia was 15 shekels, the value of the estimated 3,800 textiles imported every year would be



27. Bronze axe from Kültepe. Kültepe Excavation Archives.

about 950 pounds, or 475 kilos. The tin would be sold at the average price of 7 shekels of tin per shekel of silver, giving in all 570 kilos of silver. We would accordingly reach a somewhat higher total of more than a ton of silver, but from that we would have to subtract payments for taxes, transportation and other expenses, so the different ways of calculation lead to results that are not too far from each other. It was noted in the preceding chapter that texts from Mari, contemporary with the later level 1b period, refer to Assyrian caravans in Syria, one of which consisted of no fewer than 300 donkeys. Such figures make the speculations presented here quite plausible.

It must be stressed that these primitive statistical exercises can give no more than a very general idea of the scale of the Old Assyrian trade, but they nevertheless force us to consider the issues of production and consumption. Moreover, these conclusions are relevant to our understanding of the economy of other regions in the ancient Near East as well, for it is obvious that the trade centred on Anatolia was just one leg in a much wider system of exchange, one that certainly reached from the Persian Gulf to the shores of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and which most probably involved contacts with even more distant regions: central Asia in the east and the Aegean in the west.

An annual import of 4 tons of tin into Anatolia can make sense only if there was a market and the potential for a very large production of bronze. Tin would make up no more than 10 percent of the finished bronze object, so the annual consumption of copper, the other necessary ingredient, would be almost 36 tons, giving a total bronze production of close to 40 tons (Figure 27).

We know that the Assyrian traders conducted an elaborate and very substantial trade in copper within the borders of Anatolia. Consignments weighing several tons were shipped on carts from the Pontic region in the

north along a well-established route that appears to have ended in the town Purushaddum on the western border of central Anatolia. Some of this copper was presumably distributed farther west, towards the Aegean, but as far as we know Assyrian merchants hardly ever sent copper back to Assur from Anatolia. The low bulk value of copper coupled with the geography, which entailed passing through narrow valley roads and crossing the passes of the Taurus Mountains, would have made such a venture very difficult and quite expensive. The notion, presented in a general study of the Old Assyrians in Anatolia, that the rationale for the Assyrian presence in Anatolia was the procurement of copper for Assur is therefore entirely misleading.⁴

However, following the river Tigris from Assur and Nineveh towards the north-east, one eventually reaches a rich copper-producing area around Ergani Maden in the foothills of the Taurus chain, and it cannot be ruled out, although there is no evidence, textual or archaeological, that this was a source of the copper that must, of course, have come to Assur from somewhere. Ilushuma in the account of his reforms claimed that he “washed the copper” of the Akkadians, but what exactly that means is uncertain. He could be referring to the import of copper from the south, originating in the mines of Oman, or he could be boasting that Assur could provide copper to the south. If in fact the Assyrians exploited the copper sources at Ergani, or at least bought their supplies there, a completely new circuit of trade which is entirely unmentioned in the texts from Kültepe would have existed, linking Assur to at least some of the towns in the north Syrian steppe, but in my view that appears to be unlikely.

Although the actual copper mines used during this period in Anatolia have not been located, it seems clear that they were somewhere in the Pontic region, where copper has always been mined. We do have a good deal of information about the trade in copper. It appears that copper mines were scattered over a large area, and different varieties of ore were associated with the names of specific cities located at or close to the mines. Most of the copper came from areas close to the town Durhumit, which became the main centre for the trade in this metal, and Tishmurna, whose precise location is unknown. As shown by Dercksen these towns were metallurgical centres where copper was refined and where the Assyrian merchants purchased what they referred to as good or high-quality copper. Slag heaps have been found at various places in the Pontic region, some dating back to the fourth millennium and testifying to a production that was already at this early time “on an almost industrial scale”.⁵ The smelting process, converting “bad” into “refined” copper, involved the removal of impurities such as iron from the ore.

Very large quantities of copper were shipped from Durhumit via the town Wahshushana to the great centre Purushaddum, where it was exchanged for silver. The transport was by way of ox-driven carts over quite long distances. There are a variety of suggestions in the scholarly literature concerning the exact location of practically all cities and countries mentioned in the Old Assyrian texts. In my view the most convincing geographical scheme, one that will have to be tested by way of archaeological excavations, has been offered by Barjamovic, who locates the copper-producing regions in the area around modern Merzifon, the important road station Wahshushana at or near a crossing of the great river Kızıl Irmak and the end station for the Assyrian caravans going towards the west close to the modern town of Bolvadin.⁶

Many references to copper mention very large quantities, often running to several tons, and one has to wonder what became of these shipments. In his argument for placing Purushaddum so far to the west, Barjamovic suggested that this town was in fact the gateway to another commercial circuit, one never directly exploited by the Assyrian traders but one that led farther west down the river valleys towards the Aegean coast. For the Assyrians Purushaddum was the final destination, and building on their commercial know-how the merchants developed a new network within Anatolia, exploiting the availability of copper in the north and creating a special copper route leading towards the south-west. In principle this circuit was independent of the one that linked Assur with Anatolia, although it was based on a steady input of tin and textiles and eventually led to large amounts of silver. It is logical to assume that these procedures developed gradually during the formative years of the Assyrian trade, becoming increasingly important during the thirty years of the fully developed system. In the later phase of level 2 some Assyrian merchants chose to settle permanently in Durhumit, from which they could control the trade in copper, and we must assume that many caravans from Assur went directly to this town instead of to Kanesh, so that the copper could be bought with tin and textiles brought there.

Dercksen has analysed several archives and described the mechanics of the copper trade.⁷ As discussed earlier, he has also suggested that a number of texts which refer to very large transactions in copper should be linked to the affairs of the Office of the Colony, in particular the procedures concerning deposit on accounts in the office. I shall concentrate on another group of documents that reflect the trade in massive amounts of copper, but they do not appear to have any relationship to the central bureau of the colony.

The archive of the Shalim-Assur family contains a dossier of texts that are concerned with a trading adventure in which very large amounts of copper

and wool were involved. These texts give us a glimpse of procedures that were probably commonplace but which would perhaps be recorded on texts that were stored in archives in Durhumit and Purushaddum rather than in Kanesh. However, the main reason we know so much about this particular transaction is – as always – that it did not go according to plan.

In my interpretation the business began with the formation of a short-term partnership in Kanesh, one that was designed to acquire large amounts of copper in Durhumit, which would be shipped to Purushaddum, where it would be exchanged for wool; this wool would then be sold for silver, and the profits would be shared among the investors. Shalim-Assur had brought together fifteen other traders in a consortium in which he must have been the main investor and the man responsible towards his partners.

In my edition of the archive, I have presented the relevant texts as “the Ushinalam affair”, because a man of this name came to play a central role in the activities as they unfolded.⁸ He was a high-ranking official in Purushaddum, perhaps the crown prince, and clearly not a man to be trifled with. The texts on the basis of which I have reconstructed this particular transaction were stored in the archive in Kanesh in a box or basket to which was affixed a tag saying: “Memoranda with witnesses concerning the proceeds from Ushinalam’s wool”. Fifteen such small documents regulate the final payment to the investors, stating simply that the fifteen men have received amounts in silver resulting from the sale of Ushinalam’s wool. These payments amount to nearly 148 pounds of silver, and to this we would have to add the investment and profit from the main protagonist, Shalim-Assur.⁹ He had placed the responsibility for this entire affair in the hands of a man called Abu-shalim, who is consistently described as his “slave”. It seems that things went well until the copper reached Purushaddum, when Ushinalam on behalf of the palace became involved in the exchange of the copper for wool. He was later to claim that he had not been paid the copper he should have received.

Letters from Shalim-Assur to his representatives in Kanesh and to the plenary assembly there and the envoys from the City give a detailed account of the affair. Ushinalam must have complained to the assembly of the Purushaddum colony, and as a result official letters from the Assyrian assembly in Purushaddum, accompanied by the secretary of the colony and a person representing Ushinalam, arrived in Kanesh. The plenary assembly there was informed that the slave now owed 16,040 pounds of copper (some 8 tons) to the palace in Purushaddum as the price of wool; a further 30,000 pounds of copper appeared to be owed on top of this, and it is obvious that Ushinalam was adamant that he be paid in full. On the basis of the messages

from Purushaddum, Shalim-Assur was duly arrested and sent off, “in fetters”, to clear up the mess left by his slave. In Purushaddum he paid 15,000 pounds of copper to the palace and clearly expected the matter to be concluded, but Ushinalam claimed that he was owed a further 40 pounds of silver and handed Shalim-Assur over to palace officials, so he was in effect a prisoner.

It may be assumed that it was at this point that fifteen Assyrians in Purushaddum, in their capacity as members of the local Assyrian assembly, made a public statement to the effect that no one should any longer sell textiles to Ushinalam, and it may have been this kind of pressure that in the end resolved the conflict and made it possible for Shalim-Assur to return to Kanesh and pay his partners in the consortium a reasonable return on their investments.

The dossier shows a close relationship between the trade in copper and that in wool, but it illustrates first of all the existence of the new commercial circuit that was being created and exploited by the Assyrians in this phase of the trade. The amounts involved were very considerable, so even though the goods themselves were not very valuable, it became highly profitable for the Assyrians to engage in trade in copper and wool. Unfortunately, the texts in the dossier do not mention the original investments made by the fifteen partners, so it is impossible to determine precisely how profitable such an affair would be.

The dossier also indicates that the palace was the main or even the only purchaser of these vast amounts of copper. In the absence of official or administrative textual evidence from the Anatolian palaces, it is not possible to say much more, but it is understandable that these institutions would be in a position to organise large-scale production facilities. Excavations at Acemhöyük have revealed the existence of installations for smelting copper, apparently under the authority of the palace.¹⁰ At Kültepe a number of workshops have been excavated in the lower town, where the production of copper and bronze objects took place. These workshops were clearly private, but there is ample room on the mound for palace installations; most of the textual references to smiths give Anatolian names for them, but we know that some of the workshops were owned by persons with Assyrian names. In the houses were found furnaces, pot bellows, blow pipes, tuyères and crucibles together with moulds and stone tools.¹¹ In some private houses which were not workshops were found a variety of moulds for axes, daggers, chisels, files and rings, indicating that the customers would at least sometimes bring their own moulds along to the smith.

Whereas relatively few objects made of bronze and copper have been found during the excavation at Kültepe – presumably because they were

valuable and had been removed before the destruction of the lower town, we have some textual evidence about the inventory of a household in which bronze objects are listed. One such text mentions 1 talent, 17 pounds of bronze objects (ca. 40 kilos), another 1 talent, 40 pounds (ca. 50 kilos); apart from the listed items (stands for pots, lamps, bowls, measuring cups, vessels of various types, spoons, ladles, knives, mirrors and jars), the kitchen would also have contained at least one kettle and a cauldron used for cooking, usually weighing 10–25 kilos each. So a typical household would have had objects of bronze weighing some 50–75 kilos.¹²

Obviously, we cannot on the basis of such references reach convincing conclusions concerning the consumption and production of bronze objects in Anatolia. The metal was used for a great variety of purposes, for instance in weaponry, for agricultural implements and for display, and even if something like 50 percent of the copper was meant for export from Anatolia to the Aegean, the estimates given earlier concerning the import of tin simply show how little we can say with certainty about the patterns of consumption within Anatolia. If Kanesh, as suggested by Tahsin Özgüç, had a population of 20,000–30,000 people, what does that tell us about the population of the central Anatolian region touched by the trade? How much bronze would be consumed by the people in Kanesh alone?

The observations made about tin and bronze are equally germane to the question of the sale and distribution of the thousands of expensive textiles that came to Anatolia every year. Whereas the tin was consumed primarily by the palaces, textiles most probably were sold to private families and individuals as well. We have a few references to traders going to “the villages”¹³ to sell textiles, and rich villagers would undoubtedly have been happy to acquire these luxury items, which were very well suited for lavish display of wealth and status. A single textile of fine quality could easily cost the same as a slave or a donkey.

It should in this context be kept in mind that the weaving technology was ubiquitous; in fact, it is clear that the Anatolian weavers used an upright loom that in some respects was superior to the horizontal one used in Mesopotamia, and we know that many woollen textiles were indeed being produced there. Some Assyrian traders seem to have developed a preference for such Anatolian products, and there are even indications that women in Assyrian households in Kanesh were involved in their production. However, the Anatolian textiles were always cheaper than the imported wares, and it seems that they were used for the clothes of servants only, never for the dress an Assyrian would wear.¹⁴

A group of Assyrian merchants, among them some of the most prominent men in Kanesh, were at some point fined very heavily by the city assembly in Assur for having engaged in the trade in Anatolian textiles that were somehow made to look like the main Assyrian import, the *kutānum* textile. The big men in Assur were obviously not interested in allowing such a competing industry to be developed with the help of the Assyrian commercial expertise.¹⁵

The imported textiles had a bewildering variety of designations, some of which seem to point to a place of origin. These names simply show that textiles were being produced everywhere, but in some cases the meaning must be that the textile in question was made according to the style or technique of a special place.¹⁶ The exception is the “Akkadian textiles” which clearly came from southern Mesopotamia, brought to the market in Assur together with the tin. This is made clear not only by the terminology (Akkad is a common designation for the northern part of the Mesopotamian alluvial plain); their origin is also mentioned in a couple of letters where people in Assur explain to their correspondents in Anatolia that they are unable to send any textiles of this type because the caravans from the south have not arrived.¹⁷ Relatively few textiles are said to be Akkadian, but it is likely that many pieces with other designations in fact do come from the south. It is a fascinating thought that cloth produced in a city in southern Mesopotamia could end up in a house on the Black Sea coast.

Textiles were certainly produced in Assur, as we learn from letters to women in the households there. These texts are of great interest because sometimes they give detailed specifications about the type of textile that should be produced,¹⁸ but they also show that this home industry was limited so it cannot explain the large number of textiles sent to Anatolia. There may have been weaving establishments in the city, perhaps under the authority of the city government, and there may have been a putting-out production in the villages around Assur, but all such speculations lack textual support.¹⁹

Tests made at the Centre for Textile Research in Copenhagen have shown that the several tasks involved in the production of a textile – cleaning and combing the wool, spinning, setting the loom and finally weaving – were very time-consuming. Producing a textile of the standard size known from the Old Assyrian texts (4 by 4.5 metres) would take around 150 days for one woman, so the annual production for such a weaver would be no more than 2½ textiles. A large household in Assur with slaves and the women of the family involved in the work is assumed by Michel to have been able to turn out 25 textiles annually, of which at least 5 would have served the needs of

the household itself. A maximum of 20 textiles could accordingly have been made available for export by such a large household.²⁰

Since the textiles imported to Anatolia were normally of a standard size and weight, the texts only very rarely inform us about these matters. The only detailed information comes from a letter from Puzur-Assur to a woman called Waqqurtum in Assur in which he asks her to produce thin textiles:

Let them full one side of the textile. They should not tease it. Its warp should be close, so compared to the textile you sent previously process one more pound of wool into each textile – but keep them thin. The other side they should full lightly. If they want to raise the nap, they should tease them like a *kutānum*.²¹

Puzur-Assur insists that he does not want another Abarnian textile like the one she sent him earlier, and if she cannot manage to produce the wanted thin ones, he suggests that she buy some, since he has heard that “there are plenty for sale there”. And finally he wants the textiles to measure 9 cubits in length and 8 in width – that is, ca. 4.5 by 4 metres.²² The weight of a textile is difficult to judge, but Veenhof has suggested ca. 5 pounds as the standard. Many pieces were to be used for clothes, and it seems that the merchants normally traded in standard sheets of fabric, which could then be used for the creation of garments.

From the Babylonian south we have a great deal of information about textile production, especially from the preceding Ur III period, where state-run production systems have left us a very elaborate administrative archive of thousands of texts. The leading expert in this field has argued that the annual production in the cities under the authority of the Ur government “was huge, certainly significantly more than 60,000 pieces”,²³ and we have evidence of payments from the administration to women and men involved in the various aspects of the textile industry indicating that in some cities the number of personnel ran into tens of thousands. The information contained in the bureaucratic archives from this period is truly lavish: we are told how many days (sometimes months) it would take for a woman to complete the various kinds of textiles produced, the types and quality of wool and fabrics, the payment scale for the various positions in the system, even the names of many of the persons engaged in this vast production.²⁴

After the fall of the central Ur government, political power in the south shifted to a few smaller states in the period called “Isin-Larsa” after the two dominating polities. We do not have evidence from them about similar centralised production systems, but it is unlikely that things changed drastically. The huge potential for wool output in the region certainly did not change,

and workshops for textile production must have existed, albeit probably not on the same scale and with the same attention to administrative control as in the preceding period. From the later palace at Mari we do have evidence of large production facilities staffed by women who were prisoners of war.²⁵ The capacity for making a huge number of textiles in the south is not in doubt, and it seems possible that the majority of the finished products sent from Assur to Anatolia originated there.

As already mentioned they arrived at Assur in caravans conducted by people from the south, and there is no evidence to suggest that a large number of merchants from Assur settled in the cities where the textiles were produced. A letter from Pushu-ken's bosses in Assur tells us:

Concerning the purchase of the textiles of the Akkadians that you wrote about, since you left the Akkadians have not entered the city. Their country is in revolt, but if they arrive before winter, and if there will be a profitable purchase for you, then we shall buy some for you.²⁶

Tin and textiles were bought on the market in Assur, as we know from other letters, but we lack precise information about the purchase practices. Goods to be shipped to Anatolia are often said to have been acquired in the houses of certain individuals. Most probably the important merchants in Assur had large houses where they could keep stocks of goods and where they could stable the donkeys.

Even though the Old Assyrian trade centred on Anatolia was to some extent disconnected from the production and trade in southern Mesopotamia, since the merchants in Assur simply had to wait for caravans to arrive from the south and did not themselves go there to pick up goods, we do have some scattered evidence that a few Assyrians lived in cities on the southern plain. It seems that some connection was established with the city Sippar on the Euphrates, a commercial city on the edge of the plain which probably functioned much in the same way as Assur. A few letters found there tell us that a Sippar woman lived in Assur, presumably married to a local Assyrian merchant, and she was in regular contact with her family in the south.²⁷ New discoveries may enlarge our picture and perhaps show much more extensive contacts, both of a commercial and of a private nature.

As mentioned, tin came to Assur from the south, just as did the Akkadian textiles. We are told in a couple of related texts that the tin caravans are expected from "the Lower Lands", and it seems reasonable to assume with Dercksen that this phrase referred to the lands south of Eshnunna, namely the alluvial plain in southern Mesopotamia.²⁸ The caravans are said to be delayed, but there is no indication that this is for political reasons.

Whereas the Akkadian textiles originated in the south, the tin did not, and we do not know precisely from where it came to Babylonia. It may be remembered that the very old Ilushuma inscription discussed in Chapter 7 spoke of three roads from the south to Assur: one was via Ur on the Persian Gulf and Nippur in central Babylonia; the second was via the two towns Awal and Kismar, both located in the areas east of the Tigris with links to the Hamadan Road through the Zagros Mountains, and the third was via the town Der, located east of the huge swamps around the lower course of the river Tigris, a known station on the road to the town Susa in Khuzestan.

The first road must have connected to the maritime route linking Ur with regions across the Persian Gulf known as Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha – respectively the island of Bahrain, Oman with its large copper deposits and the Indus culture. Ilushuma accordingly seems to have been thinking of the supply of copper for the market in Assur.

The second route links up with the important city Eshnunna in the Diyala region (apparently of no political significance during the time of Ilushuma), and it is reasonable to assume that this road therefore was used for the import of textiles specifically from the south, but it cannot be ruled out that the road from the Diyala region to the Iranian plateau was in operation, which would mean that caravans with tin could have come this way from farther east. In the later Mari texts we read of caravans carrying tin that in fact are said to come from Eshnunna.

Finally, the third route from Susa via Der is unquestionably connected to the roads leading farther east across the Iranian plateau, and we know that quantities of tin came through Susa to the cities in Babylonia. Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide meaningful estimates of how much tin was consumed in Elam or Babylonia, but it seems unlikely that the majority of the imports from the east were shipped on to Assur.

Where precisely did the tin come from? At present it seems that scholarly opinion favours north-eastern Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as the most likely places of origin. Extensive ancient mining operations have been discovered there, and they appear to date to precisely the Middle Bronze Age, the first half of the second millennium BC. The semi-precious stone lapis lazuli, which was very popular in the ancient Near East and which is mentioned many times in the Old Assyrian texts, comes from deposits in north-eastern Afghanistan, the Kokcha Valley, which even in normal, peaceful conditions is a remote, largely uninhabited region. A very large mine has been found at Darreh-Zu, now exhausted, and the main mine is now called Sar-e-Sang, where considerable quantities are

apparently still being mined. What the precise situation is at the moment is not clear to me.²⁹

At any rate, the large-scale import of lapis into Mesopotamia makes it less unlikely that quantities of tin could also come from this distant area – or even farther away. However, lapis may be counted in pounds at most, whereas the tin trade presupposes the transportation of very large shipments running to many tons, and the fact is that we know nothing about this supposed eastern leg of the commercial system. Tin becomes visible only when it enters the greater Mesopotamian region, probably in the city Susa. And we know from the evidence concerning the trade in the Old Assyrian texts that transportation of such huge quantities involved not only donkey caravans of hundreds of animals and men, but a quite considerable infrastructure in the form of roads, bridges or ferries, inns and cities, as well as regulated treaty-borne relations along the routes. It is hard to imagine that the long trek from Tajikistan to Susa could have been organised in a substantially different manner, and the total absence of archaeological or textual evidence to support this picture is disturbing.³⁰

On the other hand, distances were perhaps not so important, and a recent article has in fact suggested an even more distant source in eastern Kazakhstan, since tin from Troy has the same metallurgical characteristics as ore from that source.³¹ These are tantalising glimpses that appear to support the idea of a central Asian origin for the tin traded by the Old Assyrian merchants, but we must await much more detailed and elaborate archaeological and metallurgical analyses before these ideas can be accepted. So far no convincing alternative source has been found, although there has been mention of tin mines in the Zagros in Iran.³² The present political conditions in the regions involved preclude clear and coherent answers, but we can at the very least say that the Old Assyrian trade makes sense only as part of a much wider network of contacts.

FAMILIES AND MONEY

SINCE ALL OF OUR TEXTUAL DOCUMENTATION COMES FROM ARCHIVES in private houses, it is no surprise that there is a strong focus in the material on the activities of families. Moreover, comparative historical evidence tends to emphasise the importance of family bonds as the structuring principle of long-distance commerce. As pointed out by the economic historian Frederic C. Lane, “[I]n most societies, at most times, it has been the great family which by its wealth, power, prestige, and presumption of permanence has been the outstanding institution in private economic enterprise.”¹ What defined a person in society was first of all his or her family, and one of the fundamentally important elements of Old Assyrian social life was the ancestral home, the *bēt abini*, “our father’s house”. On the other hand, the model of a family firm that may be found, for example, in the Italian cities of the Renaissance cannot simply be transferred to the Old Assyrian material. There are significant differences, and some of the characteristics of the later structures are not to be found in Assur and Anatolia, in many instances because the relevant commercial or financial instruments had not been invented yet. We also have to reckon with major differences within the Old Assyrian period, expecting developments and changes as pointed out in the discussion of the chronology of the 250 years of the Assyrian presence in Anatolia, and in a synchronic perspective we are likely to find that not all families operated in the same manner.

First we have to confront the major problem that all of our texts come from the archives in Kanesh. This means that we are inadequately informed about the people who lived in Assur and who presumably never dreamed of setting foot in Anatolia, and many of them clearly belonged to the elite, the men who operated as the main financiers of the trade and for whom the people in Anatolia functioned as agents, representatives, subordinates and sometimes partners. These men do appear repeatedly as the senders of letters

to Anatolia, giving orders or making requests, so we know the names of many of the leading citizens, but in most instances it is impossible to determine what their precise relationship was to the men and women to whom they wrote. Since they hardly ever appear in contexts where their father's name would be mentioned, as witnesses or parties to a contract, we cannot know whether they were related by family ties to their agents in Kanesh. We can construct elaborate family trees for the main groups in Anatolia, but for most kinship groups we have very little information about who the men in Assur were and how they were related to the correspondents in Anatolia. This is a great loss which obscures the nature of the links between the people in the colonies and their bosses in the home city.

The family trees presented in the appendix show considerable differences. In the case of the Assur-idi family we find a situation with a father in Assur and three sons who functioned as his agents in Anatolia, but we cannot say with any degree of certainty whether Assur-idi had close relatives in Assur; we do not know the name of his father, and we do not know whether he himself ever visited or perhaps even lived for extended periods in Anatolia.² It seems from the evidence we have that Assur-idi in Assur was running a fairly tightly organised firm where he functioned as the boss of his three sons, Assur-nada, Assur-taklaku and Ili-alum, but whether and to what extent this nucleus was connected to other individuals and groups is unclear. He certainly had contacts with other men in Kanesh, notably a certain Ali-ahum, but we do not know what the basis was for his relationship with this man.

The contact between Assur and Anatolia as revealed by the archive of the Shalim-Assur family is much less clear, despite the fact that we have the complete archive of some 1,200 texts. We know that Shalim-Assur's father Issu-arik at one time lived in a house in Kanesh, just as he had a house in Hahhum, but he moved to Assur and seems to have died soon after. Shalim-Assur himself lived in the town Durhumit during his last years, but in the archive in the house in Kanesh there were also some letters addressed to him, indicating that at least occasionally he would stay here. Chief among the men who wrote to him from Assur was Shu-Tammuzi, but we have no indication of his relationship to Shalim-Assur's family. There are several more letters *from* Shalim-Assur in the archive, which is consistent with the fact that he lived elsewhere; these letters show that he had two groups of representatives in Kanesh, apparently engaged in the same types of affairs, and both groups collaborated with his sons, especially the oldest one, called Ennam-Assur. It is accordingly clear that his documented business relations were almost exclusively with persons outside his family, and the two sons were apparently helping and assisting the father's representatives. It is

interesting to note that Shalim-Assur's older brother Assur-bel-awatim, who held the high post of *laputtā'um* in the city government in Assur, is virtually absent from the archive and appears not to have taken part in the family's economic life – apart from having invested in his brother's joint-stock fund.

His second brother Iddin-abum left a small group of texts in the archive, mainly concerned with his attempt to convince a number of people in Kanesh to invest in his joint-stock partnership.³ The rest are documents that were put together in connection with the settlement with creditors, customers and investors that happened after he had died. When he was lying on his death-bed in Hahhum, Iddin-abum appointed his brother as executor of his estate:

When Iddin-abum was dying and was staying in (his brother) Assur-bel-awatim's house, the representatives of Ili-bani, Wardum and other customers came in and Ili-bani's representatives said: "Settle accounts with us."

But Iddin-abum answered: "Hold your tablets ready, for my own tablets have been written and are at hand. My brother Shalim-Assur should come, and then settle with him. At that time my own representatives Shu-Enlil and Amur-Ishtar can assist my brother. But until my brother arrives, no one may open my tablets."⁴

Iddin-abum had three sons, and one may wonder why they were not entrusted with the settlement of the estate by their father. In fact, conflicts of a quite serious nature soon broke out between them and their uncle. Shalim-Assur did not get to Hahhum before Iddin-abum died, and as soon as that happened a group of people who had invested in his partnership fund, including his nephew, the son of Assur-bel-awatim in Assur, had the house sealed and his slaves distrained as security for the money. Shalim-Assur's own agents on the spot paid the relevant sums and reopened the house and reclaimed the slaves before he came.

The events that followed throw an interesting light on the relationship between close members of a family. It is clear that each individual had his (or her) private funds and that there was no family fund, so debts and investments created bonds and responsibilities that connected people both within and outside the circle of family members.⁵ The conflict that developed between Shalim-Assur and Iddin-abum's sons was based on an arrangement going back several years to a time when their father Issu-arik was still alive, and it reflects the power of the paterfamilias. It appears that at an earlier point in his career, Iddin-abum got into serious trouble and had to be bailed out by Shalim-Assur, who had been ordered to help his brother by their father Issu-arik.

In connection with his activities to arrange for a settlement in Anatolia of his brother's estate, he obviously had to secure his own interests as well, and he had a claim on Iddin-abum's estate based on the loan extended earlier. He therefore confronted his nephews before witnesses and asked them to investigate the documents left by Iddin-abum in order to find references to the debt obligation he had towards Shalim-Assur. The nephews pointed out that all of their father's tablets were now in Assur, where the final accounting would take place. Interestingly, at this time Shalim-Assur was not in a position to produce a tablet of his own to prove that Iddin-abum really did owe him money, and in a slightly later deposition before witnesses the nephews reasonably asked him precisely how much he was owed, to which he gave a rather vague answer:

I detain you for either 1 or 2 talents of silver in accordance with the certified tablets, money I paid to cover your father's debt. Now, including interest it has become 5 talents of silver!⁶

Clearly, such a loose declaration could not form the basis of a precise claim, so after a succession of meetings and some decisions taken by various courts in Anatolia, Shalim-Assur in the end had to rely on his agents in Assur to produce a legally binding document in which witnesses to the original arrangement would explain what had happened. His representative Adad-rabi finally cornered the witnesses, as he explained in a letter to Shalim-Assur:

With respect to the tablets concerning Iddin-abum that you wrote about, I asked Assur-malik and Shalim-Assur (a namesake living in Assur), saying: "When Issu-arik cleared up Iddin-abum's affairs with Merani, with the Ishtar-priest and with Zaktaya's firm, giving him an interest-free loan – at that time he paid what silver he could pay – did they certify tablets for the rest of the silver, stating that Iddin-abum owed it and that Shalim-Assur guaranteed for it?"

They answered: "No tablet whatever was certified. He sent us the silver and we paid the men." They continued: "It is true that Issu-arik discussed the matter with him in our presence and said: 'Pay your brother's debt, both here and abroad, and then go and take it out of your brother's funds. If there is no money belonging to your brother, you must pay out of your own joint-stock capital.'"

For this statement, claiming that Issu-arik talked with you in their presence, I shall lead them to the Gate of the God and acquire a tablet.⁷

The witnesses to the original orders issued by Issu-arik were willing to swear to the correctness of the claims, and in that way Shalim-Assur would

finally get a legally binding document with which he could pursue the matter. When the money had originally been handed over from brother to brother, it had clearly not been felt to be necessary to write a document, but that turned out to be a complication. One notes, however, that no precise amount is mentioned, and that would presumably therefore have to be established on the basis of a perusal of the archive left by Iddin-abum, where the various payments would be documented. The matter was not finally cleared up with this, however, for Iddin-abum's oldest son insisted on contesting Shalim-Assur's claims and questioning his action as the executor of Iddin-abum's estate, so the whole matter ended up before the city assembly in Assur, and we can see that the conflict lasted at least three years.

Although both Iddin-abum and his brother at the time of the original deal were grown men who administered large partnership funds, they were clearly under the authority of their father, who could order Shalim-Assur to take money from his own partnership capital and spend it on repaying the debts of his brother. One must wonder whether this would have been viewed as quite proper, for his capital was surely meant to fund his own commercial activities only. There is in other words a latent conflict between the fundamental notion of personal rather than family funds, on the one hand, and the authority of the *paterfamilias*, on the other.

The merchants staying for extended periods in Anatolia built up a network of personal relations that in some instances became quite close. The archives of Shalim-Assur's agents and representatives in Kanesh have not been found and/or published, so we cannot describe the connections between them in detail. However, we have evidence from unexcavated archives of such circles of colleagues and partners.

One of the best-known persons whose archive was in the unexcavated material was Pushu-ken, who must have left a huge number of documents for the villagers to dig up. It is, of course, now scattered all over the world in museums and collections, and so far no attempt has been made to reconstruct what is remaining, presumably only a fraction of the original total. Edward Stratford has analysed a small part of the extant correspondence, letters exchanged with a certain Shalim-ahum in Assur.⁸ It appears from this dossier that Pushu-ken for a number of years functioned as the agent in Kanesh for this man in a subordinate position. Shalim-ahum sent a stream of caravans with tin and textiles, and Pushu-ken was charged with the sale and all of the complex relations with credit agents and customers in Anatolia. There is nothing in the material to indicate that the two men were related to each other by family links, but, of course, they may have shared a grandfather or in some other way had ties that are not visible in our documentation.

Pushu-ken's family had close connections with another well-known Kanesh trader and his family, Imdi-ilum son of Shu-Laban and grandson of Amur-ili. His house was dug partly by the villagers of Kültepe and partly by Hrozny, and it contained a very large archive. The family has been reconstructed and can be traced through no less than five generations.⁹ The grandfather Amur-ili was not alive at the time covered by the archive, and the father Shu-Laban is attested only very few times, but in his letters from Assur he admonishes the young Imdi-ilum in a typical paternal phrase: "Urgent! Take care and let me see you act like a gentleman!"¹⁰ After the father's death the main correspondents in Assur were Imdi-ilum's two uncles Assur-imitti and Shu-Hubur,¹¹ and the latter was also in frequent correspondence with Pushu-ken.

No fewer than twenty-six names can with some certainty be placed in Imdi-ilum's family tree, and in this case we have several known persons in Assur. Characteristically, these men, uncles and others, had a higher social status than Imdi-ilum and appear to have wielded more power. He had one uncle, however, a man called Amur-Ishtar, who was active in Anatolia, primarily in the trade in copper and wool.

The clearest formulation of what a partnership entailed comes from a document that was set up in order to cancel the association between this Amur-Ishtar and Pushu-ken, written after both had died.¹² An elaborate agreement was set up, involving an attorney for the Amur-Ishtar family, his four sons in Anatolia, a daughter and a further son who lived in Assur, plus Pushu-ken's three sons in Kanesh as well as a daughter who lived in Assur and a son who appears to have been mentally incapacitated ("different" is the phrase used in other texts about him), and they took an oath to seal the dissolution of the partnership. The text tells us that in such a partnership the two men could function as each other's representatives; they could send deposits to each other and collect debts for each other; they could store debt notes and legal documents for each other and accept investments. It seems clear that Imdi-ilum must have had a similar relationship to Pushu-ken.

Imdi-ilum had three brothers and a sister, and his archive shows that he was in close contact with all members of his family. Imdi-ilum's brothers were all in Anatolia, where they dealt with all aspects of the current commercial and legal transactions. The oldest of these brothers, a man called Ennam-Belum, travelled to Assur a number of times in charge of caravans; he collected debts and negotiated with customers, and he clearly had his own personal interests to take care of as well. His own archive may well lie in one of the unexcavated houses in the lower town. After Imdi-ilum moved back

to Assur for his retirement, it was this brother who took over as the family's main agent in Anatolia with his base in Kanesh.

Imdi-ilum's career can be followed for about twenty years, from the early eighties to eponym year 103 (ca. 1888–1870 BC). He ran his affairs in Kanesh for most of this time, but when at some point he moved to Assur, this was presumably because the death of his uncles had left him the senior member of the family. His archive (which still awaits an editor),¹³ studied together with the texts from Pushu-ken, shows how a group of prominent men in Kanesh were in close collaboration with each other.

Marriage was important, clearly a part of the pattern of alliances linking families to each other, as can be seen from a letter Shu-Hubur sent to Pushu-ken:

Ennam-Assur, Shalim-ahum's son, must leave with the caravan. Here he will marry the girl. Honour him there as you would me. Do not make him unhappy. Is not my son-in-law your son-in-law? Send him as quickly as possible so he may lead the girl away, for as you are my brother – is my daughter not your daughter? Pay him respect and send him.¹⁴

So Shu-Hubur, Imdi-ilum's uncle and a close associate of Pushu-ken, marries off his own daughter (whose name was Nuhshatum, "the gorgeous one") to the son of Pushu-ken's boss in Assur Shalim-ahum, in a transaction that was clearly designed to strengthen the already close links between these families. At least some families were in this way closely connected through marriage and surely through economic ties of other kinds. Imdi-ilum's sister Taram-Kubi was married to a well-known Kanesh merchant called Innaya, and Pushu-ken's sister Tarish-matum was the wife of Assur-malik. Pushu-ken, Imdi-ilum, Innaya and their bosses and families in Assur provide a clear example of such a pattern of close links between a group of families, but it is worth noting that none of these men appear to have been particularly close to the Shalim-Assur family, who also relied on a completely different group of men in Assur to take care of their interests. We urgently need more family archives from the excavated houses in the lower town in order to reach clearer and more durable conclusions about the social patterns that characterised the lives of the men and women in Assur and Kanesh.

Imdi-ilum's own wife, called Shimat-Assur, lived in Assur, as did Taram-Kubi, and these two women sent him several letters. It is noteworthy that, in these, Taram-Kubi's name is always mentioned first as an indication of her higher rank. This is in agreement with observations made by anthropologists of situations where males are absent from their homes for extended periods of time, where we find an added emphasis on women as carriers of



28. A face from Kanesh. Kültepe Excavation Archives.

titles and guardians of male interests; it is characteristic of such relationships that absentee males rely on their sisters rather than on their wives because wives are drawn from someone else's paternal interest group (Figure 28).¹⁵

One of the letters from the two ladies contains a passage that epitomises the feelings of many of the women in Assur: "You love only money! You hate your own life!" This reproach falls in a brief but strongly emotional letter in which the unmentioned subtext must be that Imdi-ilum has neglected his duties towards the Assur temple in some way and that this has resulted in sickness and unhappiness:

Here we ask the women who interpret oracles, the women who interpret omens from entrails and the ancestral spirits, and Assur gives you a warning: You love money! You hate your own life! You cannot satisfy Assur in the city. Urgent, when you have heard the letter, then come, see Assur's eye and save your own life!¹⁶

Taram-Kubi's letters to her husband Innaya show her as a forceful woman, unhappy and angry at the same time, and unwilling to bow her head and suffer in silence:

You wrote and said: "Guard the bracelets and rings you have, so they may be available to pay for your food."

In truth, you sent me $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of gold with Ili-bani, but what are those bracelets that you left me? When you went away you did not leave a single shekel of silver. You picked the house clean and took it away. Since you left there has been hardship and hunger in the city. I keep buying barley for our food....

What is this extravagance that you keep writing me about? There is nothing for us to eat. Do *we* live in luxury? I have picked clean everything in my possession and sent it to you. Today I live in an empty house!

A year has gone by. Do send me money corresponding to the value of my textiles out of your available funds, so I can buy 10 measures of barley.

With respect to the tablet with witnesses concerning Assur-imitti son of Kura, which he got hold of, he caused trouble for the household and took slave girls as pledges, but your agent cleared it up, and I had to pay $\frac{2}{3}$ pound of silver. Until you come here he will not make any claim. When you come you will have to negotiate.

Why do you keep listening to slander and sending me heated letters?¹⁷

In a letter written shortly after the one quoted she writes:

Urgent! Come as soon as you have heard the letter and meet eye to eye with Assur, your own god and your family! Then I may see your eyes while I am still alive. Sadness has entered our hearts.¹⁸

Such highly charged letters from women in Assur must be understood in the context of the development of the Assyrian involvement in Anatolia and Kanesh in particular. During the course of their lives, the generation of Shalim-Assur, Innaya, Pushu-ken and Imdilum, the first to settle more or less permanently in Kanesh, experienced a violent change in the pattern of their existence. Their home town, where they had their ancestral home, their wife and children, suddenly became a distant place that they visited when business considerations allowed or demanded it. It is no wonder that these changed circumstances placed a heavy strain on their family relations, and the women in Assur, especially, must have felt abandoned and lost. Pushu-ken, to take an example, seems to have travelled a great deal in his early youth, but in the documents from the heyday of the trade he is clearly bound to Kanesh. His wife Lamassi was therefore left alone with her children in Assur for years at a time, and we have some letters from her in which she complains of this situation and asks her husband to free himself

from the ties that bind him to Kanesh and come to Assur to visit his closest family. A typical letter shows her concerns on several levels:

As you hear, mankind has become evil. Brother stands ready to eat up brother. Show me honour by coming and breaking your commitments! Place the girl in Assur's lap!

Wool is expensive in the city. When you organise (the shipment of) the next pound of silver, then place it in (a packet of) wool. The *mūṣi'um* official demanded every pound of silver from your export tax, and I became afraid and gave him nothing. I said: "Let the eponym himself come and turn the house upside down!"

Your sister has sold a slave girl, but I redeemed her for 14 shekels.

Shalim-ahum has built two houses since you left. But as for us, when are we going to build?

The textile that Assur-malik just brought to you, why do you not send silver for that?¹⁹

This is a sad, philosophically minded woman who has to deal with all kinds of issues in the home town while Pushu-ken is busy in Kanesh (Figure 29). The girl who was to be placed in the god's lap was called Ahaha, and she was known as a priestess when she was a mature woman. The letter seems to refer to an initiation ceremony for which Lamassi obviously felt that the father's presence was needed. She was also being harassed by the Office of the Eponym, which demanded payment of the export tax for Pushu-ken's caravans; why she redeemed a slave girl sold by Pushu-ken's sister Tarish-matum is not clear, but her reference to the building activities of his Assur partner is simple to understand. All in all this letter shows, as do many more like it, that heavy duties weighed upon the shoulders of the women of this generation because, in the absence of their husbands, they were in charge of their households in Assur.

Letters from such women indicate the emotional strains involved, and we may be sure that loneliness and longing were also regular elements of the lives of the men in Anatolia. The sons and daughters of Pushu-ken's and Imdī-ilum's generation therefore did not continue along this road but created new solutions to the dilemma. Many of them married Anatolian women, who were installed in the households in Kanesh, where they were in charge of the affairs of the family; others had a suitable bride sent out from Assur to stay with them in Anatolia. Assur-nada, the son of Assur-idi who managed the affairs of his father in Anatolia, was married to such a local woman, with the name Shishahshushar, and we have several letters that they exchanged, generally written in a calm and measured tone. Shalim-Assur's



29. A shrewd businessman? Kültepe Excavation Archives.

oldest son Ennam-Assur was in the same way married to an Anatolian woman whose name was Anna-anna, whereas his younger brother Ali-ahum had an Assyrian wife, a certain Ishtar-lamassi. She lived in Kanesh, however, not in Assur; the same can be noted for Pushu-ken's sons; Buzazu's wife was an Assyrian lady called Lamasha, whereas his older brother Assur-muttabbil was married to an Anatolian woman Kunnaniya.

Imdi-ilum's children, his two sons and a daughter, appear in a series of texts. The oldest son, Puzur-Ishtar, functioned for a while as the one who

took care of the family's affairs in Kanesh while his father was in Assur; his brother Amur-ili appears most frequently as a transporter and assistant to whoever was in charge in Kanesh, and he seems to have caused his father some concern. In a letter to his daughter Ishtar-bashti and Amur-ili, Imdi-ilum impresses on the daughter that she should keep an eye on her brother when he comes to Assur to assist her:

Inform Amur-ili that he must learn how to obey! He must not interest himself only in bread and beer! He must act like a man!²⁰

Amur-ili at one point felt the need to respond in strong terms to his father's apparently constant complaints, sending him a long letter in which he claims to have done nothing wrong,:

Why do you constantly write to me, saying: "You keep sending your silver in deceit, so that the import tax is levied by other firms! So your transgressions are numerous, and concern for you has eaten me up."

What money belonging to me is it that you don't know about, and that I should have released to others? Let me go wherever you wish, take whatever there is and offer it to you to give you satisfaction! It happens, as I observe, that some take away 10 pounds of silver from their fathers' money, send it off for purchases under their fathers' noses, and when their fathers discover it they become angry – but when have I ever done such things?

Consider that when they keep doing such things and their fathers become angry with them, their fathers have uttered a curse before their god! Let that be *their* concern! Divine Assur and Manzat should not involve me in such an affair.

I swear that when I was little, when I came down and assisted you, I never did anything wrong or impertinent. But today I have in truth become your small brother, despite the fact that we are both gentlemen. I have forgotten the (harsh) words you spoke and wrote to me, as well as the fact that five or six colleagues here were appointed to check my accounts. Those too I truly did not deserve, or may the palsy seize me if that is untrue!

You are unique, my god, my trust, my guardian angel! May your father be happy, and please pray for me so I can see Assur's eye and yours!²¹

One wonders whether Imdi-ilum was simply a suspicious man, unable to really trust his own son, or whether Amur-ili's protestations hide a bad conscience. The Old Assyrian economic and social system was to a large extent built on trust, and it goes without saying that within the family it was essential that one could rely blindly on the honesty of brothers, sons and sisters.

The other son, Puzur-Ishtar, was married to a certain Ishtar-lamassi, the daughter of Assur-nada and his Anatolian wife Shishahshushar,²² and

Ishtar-bashti, Imdi-ilum's daughter, who lived in Assur during her early life, at one point came to Kanesh and there married an Assyrian called Al-tab. When Imdi-ilum in his old age went back to Assur to run the affairs of the family from there, she appears to have taken charge of the house and her two brothers. We have a letter from Imdi-ilum in Assur in which he once again reveals his rather unpleasant, nagging personal character:

When I gave you in marriage to Al-tab, it cost me 5 pounds of silver. After your husband Al-tab died you married an Anatolian, and again I had to spend 5 pounds of silver.

I personally as well as my sons, we are not important in your eyes. If I and my sons had been important in your eyes, then I would have honoured you as my daughter!

After I left to go to Assur I suffered financial losses, but you have simply ignored me.²³

This was not a nice, loving family. For Imdi-ilum it seems that his daughter's marriages were simply money out of his pocket, and perhaps he was particularly irritated because of her second, Anatolian husband.

The Imdi-ilum archive shows a family firm in operation, with constant interaction involving almost all the members. But it is clear that some of the persons who play important roles in the business were in fact not members of the family, and we have no indication either that they were registered partners. It is not obvious what the basis was for the close cooperation that we can observe, but it is interesting that a similar pattern may also be observed in the case of the Shalim-Assur family. Men who appear several times in these pages, Man-mahir or Itur-ili, functioned in various capacities for the Shalim-Assur family, usually in relatively trusted roles. They were clearly free agents, not slaves or persons who were bound by legal or debt obligations. We cannot say for certain whether they had their own economic and commercial activities, but that seems likely. One should remember that when Ali-ahum, Shalim-Assur's youngest son, tried to get the Kanesh colony to take an interest in his claim against Itur-ili, we found that this man could block his access to the authorities and had the support of the council of big men. He was in other words a more influential member of the colonial society than Ali-ahum.

A few other persons appear repeatedly in the texts in the archive, men who are clearly not independent actors but who mostly act as transporters. Aluwa, Shalim-wardi and Ewarimusha have roles that would allow us to call them employees, men who receive orders and carry out a variety of jobs for the family. What was their status and position?

Like every society in antiquity, the Old Assyrian one was based on slavery. Slaves are simply taken for granted; they would always have been under orders, but they are rarely mentioned and their status can be difficult to describe. There are three words in Old Assyrian terminology for unfree male persons: *subrum*, *wardum* and *šuharum*. The first two are usually rendered “slaves”, and the third “servant”. The lowly position of the persons referred to by the term *subrum* is shown dramatically by the entry in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (s.v. *šupru* B), where it was said that “the prices and numbers” ruled out the possibility that the term referred to a slave; instead, it was supposed to refer to a domestic animal. In fact, this word refers to the absolute bottom stratum in Old Assyrian society, that of chattel slaves, nameless and counted as animals. In a letter a certain Assur-malik complains about the severe cold that has hit him and says, “I am wrapped in rags like a *subrum*.”²⁴ I know of only a single instance where we come across the name of a *subrum*, and that is not even certain, but it appears that two men called Ashuan and Abuna are referred to as “your *subru*”.²⁵

In contrast we have scores of named persons who fall into the *wardum* category, so it is clear that a real social distinction operated here. The names are both Assyrian and Anatolian, and it seems likely that this group of people achieved their status in different ways, as debt slaves in some cases and most probably also by way of other economic transactions.

All of these persons can safely be assumed to fall outside the family pattern. They are not members of an established kinship group that operates within the Assyrian commercial system. We must ask what avenues were open to such persons if they wanted to establish themselves, and the obvious reply is by way of the so-called *be’ulātu* contract. I already referred to this procedure in the discussion of the caravan trade, where the “packers” were paid a sum of money, usually half a pound of silver, at the start of the journey, money that had to be paid back at the completion of the contract. The pay consisted of the right to invest this sum in wares that could produce a surplus, securing a profit for the packer.

It is clear, however, that this contract functioned in other contexts as well and that it made possible the hiring of personnel for shorter or longer periods of time. The many examples we have of such contracts, involving both Assyrians and Anatolians, indicate that this procedure was very common. The texts state that a certain amount of silver has been given to a named person, who is said to “possess” it and at the same time to be “held” by this money. The common stipulations concern the possibility of running away, in which case the owner of the money has the right to hire a replacement whose wages will be paid by the fugitive. It is further specified that once the

money is paid back, the man is free to leave, and in one case we read that he will be free, even without repayment of the debt, after having served for twelve years, while in another it is said that the money cannot be returned until after three years of service.²⁶

The man bound by the money accepted the authority of the one who paid him, and in this way he came under the dominance of a *paterfamilias* as a very subordinate member of the group without giving up his status as a free man. In several cases we find that the men bound by this contract were referred to as *wardum*, what we would call a slave. This makes it understandable that Shalim-Assur could entrust the huge business transaction that ended in the disastrous confrontation with Ushinalam in Purushaddum to a man called Abu-shalim, who was consistently referred to as a *wardum*. Similar responsibilities could obviously not be laid in the hands of a *subrum*, but within the group called *wardu* there was surely a wide variation, between trusted men and menial labourers, and it seems that there was a degree of overlap with the term *ṣuharum*, but the precise connotation of this word remains to be established. The feminine form *ṣuhartum* seems always to refer to a young woman, a “girl”, with no indication of an unfree status.

Finally, *amtum* can refer to a regular slave girl, but the special Old Assyrian use of the word to denote an Anatolian wife of an Assyrian trader shows that the semantic boundaries are somewhat insecure.

With the close family as the active nucleus of commercial activities, we therefore observe that a considerable number of others took part on different levels: agents or representatives would usually be persons who themselves were part of a kinship group; assistants and helpers would be both free men with a long-standing relationship to the family and persons hired by way of *be'ulatu* contracts, and the latter would presumably fall into the *wardu* and *ṣuharu* categories; finally, all of the practical, day-to-day activities would have to rely heavily on the work of regular slaves, the *subrum*, who must have been quite numerous. In a text from the Shalim-Assur archive, we read of twenty-eight *subru* belonging to a certain Manniya, twenty-one to Aššur-bani, eight and a half to Zunanum and a smaller number to Shu-Rama. Another text enumerates no fewer than ninety-six *subru* belonging to thirteen different men.²⁷

WHERE DID THE MONEY COME FROM?

ASSUR-NADA'S SON IDDIN-ISHTAR APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SOMETHING of a hothead, renouncing his grandfather in Assur, as we saw in Chapter 1, and being accused by the same Assur-idi somewhat later of having burgled the office in Assur and stolen money.¹ At some point in his career in Anatolia, his father had to intervene when he had become embroiled in a series of debts in Kanesh, Durhumit and another copper centre called Kunanamet. Assur-nada had to sit down with Shalim-ahum's oldest son, Dan-Assur, apparently the only or the major creditor, to settle accounts in the presence of witnesses. It appears that the son owed some 10 pounds of silver, which his father had to pay. In return he set up a contract with Iddin-Ishtar:

Assur-nada will give 10 pounds of refined silver to Iddin-Ishtar, (a loan) for one year; on top of the 10 pounds of silver Iddin-Ishtar will set down amounts to cover the import duty and the transport tariff; for the silver capital that Assur-nada gives to Iddin-Ishtar a tablet will be written, stating that Iddin-Ishtar owes 29 pounds, that the money will go twice to the City and that Assur-nada will thereafter take his 29 pounds of silver. If there is more, Iddin-Ishtar will take it, and if there is less, Iddin-Ishtar will supplement it... The certified tablets, both from Kanesh, Durhumit and Kunanamet, including those of Dan-Assur son of Shalim-ahum – all previously certified tablets concerning Iddin-Ishtar's debt are discarded.²

The father did help his unlucky son, but he demanded a suitable payment for his services. Iddin-Ishtar had to agree that the money – although perhaps not himself as transporter – must go twice to Assur and back and that he would then have to pay back to his father 29 pounds of silver, giving him a profit of almost 200 percent. Should the son be able to scrape together even more money, he could take the surplus, but if there was less, he would have to find the money to pay back his father.

This was not at all an unusual relationship. The examples in previous chapters of the economic relations among family members have shown quite clearly that despite the fundamental authority of the *paterfamilias* each individual enjoyed the rights and the responsibilities of personal ownership to capital, and there was no common family fund on which members could draw. There are other examples of a father lending money to his son, even of a wife forwarding money to her husband against interest.³ Iddin-Ishtar was probably lucky to have a father who was willing and able to help him.

There were, of course, limits to how much wealth an individual could amass, and we may assume that only rarely would a businessman in Kanesh be in a position to engage in the overland trade on a large scale on his own. The capital outlay for a good-sized caravan would be quite substantial, demanding big sums of silver. A merchant like Assur-idi seems to have functioned on a reasonable scale that allowed him to operate as an individual merchant, but we know that he managed a joint-stock fund, and he may have been involved in larger enterprises in partnership with other merchants, but there are scant traces of that in his letters. Others such as Imdi-ilum and Shalim-ahum could handle much greater sums.

One way of raising larger amounts of money was to create a partnership, either for a single, limited commercial activity or for a longer association that would exist beyond one business project. The first type is represented by two different procedures: one in which each of a group of merchants contributed money or goods and entrusted these to a man who would be responsible for the completion of the deal; and one in which one man contributed cash, whereas the other partners offered their services to carry out the business.

We often read of enterprises referred to as *ellat* PN, “PN’s caravan”, a phrase that can refer both to commercial affairs in the overland trade between Assur and Kanesh and to businesses within Anatolia. The word *ellutum* has a wide semantic range, from “clan” to “clique”, “crew of a ship”, “caravan”, even “pack of dogs”, and the basic idea seems to be that a number of individuals (or animals) band together to form a clearly defined group. One man was appointed together with other investors/partners to organise the enterprise, directing the business and presumably carrying (most of) the risk. Given the nature of the Old Assyrian commercial system, it is not surprising that it always involved the transportation and handling of goods.

An example of this type of partnership has already been discussed as “the Ushinalam affair” in Chapter 15. Shalim-Assur had set up a consortium of fifteen Assyrian merchants who contributed various amounts of silver for the purpose of buying copper in Durhumit, converting it to wool in

Purushaddum and then selling this wool for silver. In this case we can conclude that a group of investors contributed funds to be administered by one man, Shalim-Assur, who was responsible for the successful completion of the affair. Such deals were no doubt quite common.

The second kind of short-term partnership, again known from an example that went wrong and came to court, was referred to by the term *tappā'uttum*, which derives from the word for a partner. One clear example was concerned with the acquisition of the metal *amuttum*, generally thought to be meteoric iron. This was a hugely expensive commodity, much sought after by the local palaces, where it was probably used for jewellery and forms of display. We are in the Middle Bronze Age, where iron was a great rarity. The texts relating the exploits of King Anitta of Kanesh, referring to events that took place during the period of level 1b at Kültepe, mention that the king of Purushaddum was so incredibly wealthy that he sat on a throne of iron.⁴

The document concerning the aftermath of the *amuttu* partnership in question begins with an explanation of the creation of the partnership: Innaya and three others had banded together, and Innaya put up 20 pounds of silver, with which the three others were to buy *amuttum*; he added a further half pound of silver for expenses, and it was stipulated that none of the partners was allowed to act without the consent of the others. We are then told that two of the partners had bought 15½ shekels of *amuttum* and handed it over to one of the partners, a certain Sahaya in the town called Luhuzattiya with the understanding that he should bring it to Innaya in Kanesh.

For reasons unknown to us, but presumably as a result of unrelated business that involved an attempt to smuggle goods, Innaya was at this moment being held prisoner in the palace, so Sahaya could not contact him, and he used this opportunity to engage in his own fraudulent behaviour. He made a deal with an agent concerning the sale of the metal, and moreover he took out extra money from the fund for his own purposes. The other partners were unaware of this, and they were equally unaware that slightly later he returned to Kanesh, where the unfortunate Innaya now was bed-ridden after his ordeal in the palace; Sahaya somehow managed to cheat the sick boss out of even more money. The lawsuit referred to in the text now represents the attempt of Innaya's agents to retrieve at least some of the money.⁵

The original contract stands as a classic example of a partnership agreement. In contracts of this type one man puts up the capital and the others contribute their work, in contrast to the example concerning Ushinalam's wool. Since the text we have is not the contract itself, we are not informed about the way in which the profit from the deal was to be divided, but as all partners were independent merchants we may be sure that they were in fact

entitled to a share. In the roughly contemporary Code of Hammurabi from Babylon there is a single paragraph concerning such a partnership, where we find that “[i]f a man has given silver to another man for a partnership, they shall divide the profit or the loss equally before the god.”⁶

From Babylonia we have a number of so-called *tappātu* contracts – that is, texts arranging the conditions for partnerships, where usually one man contributes the funds whereas one or more partners carry out the actual work on a trip abroad.⁷ In general it seems that the investor, after having received his outlay, also shared in the profits realised. This type of contract could be flexible, and the relationship between investor and *tractator* could take different forms; it seems clear that a similar type of procedure was active in the Old Assyrian period.⁸

A different kind of partnership, one that allowed for the long-term concentration of large funds in the hands of competent merchants, was part of the inventory of Old Assyrian commercial practices – the contract that has been mentioned several times already as the joint-stock company or partnership. We know that this institution existed already in the years before the heyday of the trade, for we have a dossier of texts that refer to a very early and very unlucky trader called Iddin-Ishtar, who appears in the earliest dated document, from eponym year 48 (ca. 1925 BC).⁹ During the main period of the trade, this arrangement appears to have become the standard way of creating funds that could allow for participation on a high level in the over-land commerce.

Comparatively little is in fact known about the precise character of the joint-stock partnership, primarily because all the central procedures relating to it had to be carried out and recorded in Assur. The partnership contract itself is known in only one unpublished and two published exemplars, but the two known ones provide us at least with the essential features of the agreement. They both begin with a list of names of the people who have invested in the fund, the so-called *naruqum*, a word that really means “a sack”. One can imagine the original procedure in which investors would throw their contributions into such a bag. All of the amounts mentioned, usually between 1 and 3 pounds, were in gold, and in both cases it seems that it was a mixture of family members and outsiders who made the investments. In one contract the total of the fund was 27½ pounds; in the other it was 30 pounds. The normal exchange rate between gold and silver was between 6 and 8 pounds of silver for 1 pound of gold, but in the case of the *naruqu* contract it was 1 to 4. This device ensured that the investors would reap a hefty return on their money, for they all made their contribution in silver.

Having listed the names of the various investors, the contract which gave a man called Elamma his fund then says:

– In all 27½ pounds, 1 shekel of gold enters the joint-stock fund of Elamma.

Of the profit he will enjoy one-third, one-third he will guarantee.

In ten years he will render account. Who asks for his investment before its due date will receive only 4 pounds (of silver per mina of gold).

1,500 measures of barley, 2 slaves, the share (in the inheritance) and what is in the various ‘pots’ – all that is my cash capital.¹⁰

The stipulations in the other known contract, regulating the fund of a certain Amur-Ishtar, are very similar, but in that case the contract will run for twelve years, and the text states that premature withdrawal of the investment will mean that the investor will not share in the profit. The last passage concerning Elamma’s personal assets (*šaltum*) is somewhat strange. It could be an addition made by Elamma to his private copy of the contract, or it could show that the investors took an interest in a detailed inventory of his economic situation before they decided whether or not to grant him a joint-stock fund.

Thirteen names are mentioned in Elamma’s contract, fourteen in Amur-Ishtar’s. Several of the investments are made anonymously, as acknowledged by the simple statement that the investment was made by “a merchant”, which is a way of making the contract a negotiable instrument for the investors, allowing them to sell their share in the fund if they wish. In some cases there may have been a need to maintain secrecy, and in others the ownership of funds may have been unclear, for instance when a trader was engaged in an inheritance conflict. Several texts show that it would be known, and at least sometimes recorded, who was hiding behind the anonymity. Elamma’s contract shows that two of the investors were brothers of Elamma, and two others are known to have been among his closest business partners.

The laconic rules mentioned for the division of profit and the payment of dividends must mean that a running accounting was expected, either at the completion of each caravan transaction, from Assur to Anatolia and back, or at regular intervals, perhaps once every year. It is stipulated that the manager could take one-third of the profit and had to guarantee one-third of the profit, which could probably be claimed as an interim dividend by the investors. It is not clear what happened to the last part of the profit – it may have been set aside to compensate losses, or it may have been reinvested in the fund. Since all accounts had to be cleared by way of procedures in Assur,

it is understandable that we have very little concrete information about the way in which the division of profits was regulated.¹¹ A text in Shalim-Assur's archive presents a list of amounts in silver, in all 98½ pounds, that are said to represent "my joint-stock fund plus what my investors have entrusted to me out of their interest-free loans". The names listed were probably all of men who lived in Anatolia, and it seems likely that the "interest-free loans" are to be understood as the interim dividends that had been reinvested in the fund.¹²

We do not know precisely what would qualify a man to become eligible to administer such a partnership fund, but common sense tells us that he must have shown himself to be a competent and energetic trader who could be trusted to make the investment worthwhile. Some information about the process of establishing a joint-stock fund can be gleaned from a small group of texts belonging to Shalim-Assur's older brother Iddin-abum, about whose death I wrote in the preceding chapter. He left a small group of contracts in his brother's house in Kanesh, texts that were clearly very old when the building was burnt down. Why they had been kept rather than thrown away is not clear, but we are lucky to have them, for they tell us about the situation in Anatolia when Iddin-abum as a young trader went around to his colleagues and friends in order to persuade them to invest in the joint-stock fund he hoped to be given. They are simple debt notes, complete with stipulations for repayment and interest in case he did not pay in time, but they also contain passages that explain the purpose of the loan:

Reckoned from the week of Happi-ahshu and Sukkalliya within 25 weeks he must go to the City, and together with his other investors he must book Kula's name for 2 pounds of gold.¹³

He received commitments amounting to 17 pounds of gold from five different men, among them his older brother Assur-bel-awatim, who invested no less than 24 pounds of silver, corresponding to an investment of 6 pounds of gold. The second-largest sum of 20 pounds of silver (5 pounds of gold booked) came from a man called Shu-Enlil, who is known as a close partner who survived Iddin-abum and who was charged with helping Shalim-Assur when Iddin-abum was lying on his deathbed in Hahhum.¹⁴ With all this money (and one of the contracts makes it clear that the silver had actually been handed over) he would then go to Assur to try to convince further investors that he deserved to be entrusted with a joint-stock fund. Although we do not have his actual contract, we can be sure he was successful.

This procedure was an Old Assyrian invention, an extension of the partnership arrangements known from Babylonian texts, and it must be

understood in the context of the expansion of the trade centred on Anatolia that demanded very large investments of cash in the commercial transactions. The institution of the joint-stock partnership existed also before the explosion of texts in the Kanesh archives, but it is impossible to determine the evolution of the arrangement. It is clear that then the trade was at its most intense, the joint-stock partnership played a vital role in the economic and social structures. There can be little doubt that the main reason for the invention of the *naruqu* contract was that it made it possible for individual merchants to operate on such a large scale that the trade became truly profitable.

Getting such investments established a man as a trusted and valued member of the community, as we can see from a letter written by an investor called La-qep to a certain Assur-taklaku, to whom he has given a sum for his fund; he explains how he envisaged the happy future when he handed over the money:

Deposits from him will come regularly to my paternal house, and the house will be honoured; I too will be honoured in the city gate, and he himself will be honoured in the colony; moreover, he will build a house and raise children – let him perform the duties imposed by the City! ...

When I gave you a partnership investment you did not have a son, a slave girl, a slave or a house.¹⁵

Hertel has studied all the known references to the joint-stock partnership and informs me that we know of about one hundred such investment relationships, dated between years 66 and 110. We may assume that fifty to one hundred wealthy families in Assur were directly involved in joint-stock partnerships at any given time during the main period of the trade.

In line with the earlier observations that ownership of capital was individual rather than tied to a family, it is logical that the fund was entrusted to an individual trader who was solely responsible for handling the money. No doubt the position as manager of a fund conveyed a degree of prestige, but we cannot say precisely in what way. It is not unlikely that it gave the manager access to the group of “big men” who played such a vital role in the running of the colonies. In one of his letters to the son in Kanesh, Assur-idi wrote to encourage him to scrape together whatever funds he could find in Kanesh in order to be allowed to manage such a fund:

People who are less important than you administer joint-stock investments, and people less important than I have invested as much as 10 pounds of gold. Come and take up a joint-stock fund, and only then leave again. Also, if anyone there will give you anything, then take it!

As almost expected, the old man continues with a sharp rebuke, claiming that “the god is full of anger towards you”, and we understand that he needs the son to bring votive offerings pledged to several gods, including sun disks for Assur and for the god Ilabrat.¹⁶

Assur-idi's correspondence gives us an example of a fund that apparently experienced some problems. In one letter he wrote that he had to make his payments to his shareholders in a certain month, and he therefore urgently needed his sons to send him 20 pounds of silver.¹⁷ Having (of course) received no money, he returned to the matter and demanded speedy action from his sons, adding the rather ominous remark: “The men are standing right behind me,” showing that he was being pestered by his creditors.¹⁸ Another letter to his son seems to deal with a later development:

I shall negotiate with my investors. Do not send me any silver. Within five days after (the negotiation) I shall send you instructions. Should anyone seize you, saying, “Inform me of your father's silver!” – (then answer:) “Well, when the City has judged me, then I shall inform you.”¹⁹

The order not to send any money is highly unusual and obviously to be explained by his unwillingness to hand over whatever he may receive to his investors. He seems to have expected to make a deal that would settle their claims to his advantage, but he needed his son to keep his mouth shut.

We have other examples of such partnership deals that experienced difficulties, the reasons being that the trader in Anatolia had been inactive or incompetent so that he was unable to satisfy his investors at the accounting sessions that must have taken place at regular intervals, perhaps once every year. The unfortunate trader Iddin-Ishtar, not Assur-nada's son but a person who is attested in several very early texts, at one point received the following stern letter from his investors in Assur, who wrote together with his own representatives:

You wrote about our money and you made us take an oath, but still you have not deposited any money and you have not come here yourself. So we approached the city assembly and received a letter, but Ennam-Assur, Iliya and La-qepum appealed to us, and for that reason we did not send the letter. If you do not deposit the money or do not come yourself, then we shall get hold of a letter from the city assembly and the king, and we shall send it to have you discredited in the colony.

Iddin-Ishtar had in a previous letter asked his representatives to gather his investors at a meeting and make them take an oath, and now they implore him to take the situation seriously, for the threat issued by the investors to have him publicly discredited in the Kanesh colony, presumably at a meeting

of the colony's assembly, could probably destroy him as a respected merchant if it was carried out.²⁰

Even competent and experienced merchants could get in trouble, of course, but not all were treated in the same way, as we see from a letter Pushu-ken wrote to his investors, Shu-Hubur and his representatives:

I asked the god for three full years. I said: "I shall do business and clear my assets and deposit everything before them, whether it is little or much."

Shu-Hubur offered me five years, and you too agreed. But I did not accept the offer. I said: "I shall not wait five years. Within the time that I asked for from the god I shall go and clear my assets."

For my agents on whom I depend, of whom two or three have little sense, a lot of money is out of reach. It is not proper for me to mention their names to you. I said to myself: "As soon as they go, the merchant (who has not paid) will release every shekel of silver to them, and then they will deliver to me all that can be delivered."

May Assur and your own god be my witnesses: some 2 talents of silver are out of reach. Let that be enough!

My dear lords, if you please, consider how much import duty has been levied in the houses of my investors! Certify a memorandum about how many deposits will be sent during three years where no one will seize the money; then write me your pleasant answer with my servant to come, and I shall gather every shekel of silver of my assets by harvest time.²¹

This letter tells us in some detail about the relationship that existed between Pushu-ken and his investors. In my reading of the situation in which the letter was written, he was already a mature man and had run into difficulties because of some less than smart agents, who had lost as much as 2 talents of silver for him. For that reason he has asked the god, as suggested by Dercksen probably meaning the city assembly, for a three-year extension for his payments to the investors. As an indication of the trust they place in him, they suggest that he should take five years, but he is impatient to clear up the mess and feels that three years will be enough. His agents will be able to recover the money they have foolishly put in jeopardy, and he seems to be rather eager to get out from under the control of the investors. They, on the other hand, must have valued the extremely successful Kanesh agent, who, as he points out himself, has realised a large profit for them.

Pushu-ken was himself directly involved in the dissolution of the partnership fund of a certain Ikunum son of Samaya, acting on behalf of his bosses in Assur, especially Shu-Hubur. Ikunum was not able at a certain time to realise the one-third profit which he had to guarantee to his investors,

and his business in Anatolia appears to have been in very serious trouble. Shu-Hubur decided that it was necessary to involve the city assembly in the affair, and he received a letter and the permission to hire an attorney to send to Kanesh. Pushu-ken is asked to assist this attorney and as soon as a result has been reached to write to Shu-Hubur so he can “charge Ikunum’s ‘third’ on whatever he owns and take it”. In the end a compromise was reached, ending the joint-stock partnership, as appears from another letter from Shu-Hubur:

Your wrote me as follows: “Ikunum’s investors have realised each two pounds of silver for every pound of gold in their investment.”

If you find out that he can give more than 2 pounds, say 3 pounds, for each pound of gold, then make a deal with him. If he cannot offer more than 2 pounds, then write me so I can charge him for his ‘thirds’ here and make a binding agreement in the City.²²

Joint-stock partnerships rarely failed, as far as we can see, but they would, of course, be affected by events such as the death of the manager or of one or more of his investors. Investments could be inherited, as we know from Pushu-ken’s family, for after his death his investments in the partnership funds of other merchants were divided into four shares, which were received by his sons. The oldest son then bought out his brothers in order to be in full control.²³

When Pushu-ken speaks of “clearing his assets” he is clearly referring both to the investments in his partnership fund and to the profits he had been able to realise.²⁴ It is interesting that he was able to distinguish quite clearly between such partnership funds and moneys referred to by a different term, *šaltum*, which can be translated as “ready, uncommitted goods” or “cash on hand”, the term used in the contract for Elamma’s joint-stock fund for his liquid funds, obviously what he possessed at the time of the writing of the contract. We simply do not know how the individual merchant, or for that matter his investors, kept the different assets apart, but it is clear that it was done as a matter of fact. We are reminded of Shalim-Assur’s situation when he had to bail out his brother, for his father in that situation ordered him to spend part of his joint-stock fund in case he did not have enough ready cash. In the case of Ikunum’s failed partnership fund, it seems clear that Shu-Hubur plans to recover his profits from whatever the manager may own, not just the funds that were invested in his fund.

These cases have shown that the investors were often both from Anatolia and from Assur, and it follows that many men in the colonies were both investors in other people’s partnership funds and managers of one themselves.

When we have worked out the prosopographical details of more families on the basis of excavated archives, it will be possible to flesh out the general observations offered here, describing the elaborate network of connections that criss-crossed the commercial and social life of the colonies. The contract obviously strengthened the ties that already existed between members of the same family, but its unique feature, presumably its strength, was that it created a close bond between merchants from different families. In that way it enlarged the operational field for the manager of the fund, creating obligations towards people who were in a sense strangers and drawing them into his personal network as partners, agents and representatives.

In many instances, perhaps all, the manager of such a fund was linked in a special relationship with one house or family in Assur, as shown by a letter from Shu-Hubur to Pushu-ken in which he writes about the sons of a certain La-qep, a close associate of Pushu-ken who had intense commercial contacts with both Shalim-ahum and Shu-Hubur. Pushu-ken had earlier written that the two sons were now grown men and fit to administer a joint-stock fund, and Shu-Hubur writes:

Assur-shamshi (one of the sons) promised me here to take up a joint-stock fund, which will enter our house. As to his brother Assur-malik, I and Assur-shamshi sent him a letter in which Assur-shamshi wrote:

“I have promised Shu-Hubur to administer a joint-stock fund. Do not promise anything to anyone else, lest you put me to shame. Do come here and have Shu-Hubur clear your affairs.”

My dear brother, put in a word on my behalf to Assur-malik, saying: “In this house where your father and grandfather have been clothed, you too should take a joint-stock fund and be clothed yourself.”²⁵

This text shows how close the relationship could be between the manager and the main investor, an arrangement that could tie people together in business contacts over several generations.

This institution did not survive the collapse around year 110. There is no reference to any of the key terms in the later texts, and it can be concluded that the Old Assyrian joint-stock partnership was a short-lived affair. When the caravan trade no longer rested on the existence of a tight network of agents and representatives but when the pattern had reverted to the venture trade model, such long-term relationships lost their justification. The need for large concentrations of capital at the disposal of active merchants was presumably no longer there, and the trade as a whole contracted.

LAW AND DEATH

ASSUR-TAKLAKU, THE YOUNGEST BROTHER OF ASSUR-NADA, DIED QUITE young, while his father Assur-idi was still alive in Assur. He had his own family, being married to a certain Ishtar-ummi, who is called his *amtu* wife and who appears to have lived in Assur. At the same time he had a proper wife whose name is not known, and he appears to have had a troubled marital life.¹ Most probably he has left an archive in one of the houses in Kanesh, but it has not been found yet. His death at a young age led to an intervention by the city assembly in Assur, as recorded in a letter from the king:

The City has passed a verdict, and as for Assur-taklaku son of Assur-idi, if anyone abroad has given him either joint-stock capital or an investment loan, he is to receive (the money) together with his other investors in the city on the basis of the testimony of his witnesses. If he has promised any silver abroad, he must prove this with witnesses in accordance with the rules of the law stela, and then he can receive his money only there. No one must appropriate any silver. It will be collected in the city.²

These instructions were followed to the letter, as can be seen from a message written by Assur-taklaku's investors together with his father Assur-idi and seven other men in Assur to a group of colleagues in Kanesh. They explain what has happened so far and what is to be done with respect to the inheritance of Assur-taklaku:

Here we have concluded the matter concerning Assur-taklaku, and all have been paid in full in silver. We have sworn an oath by the City. There, whatever silver, tablets, working capital of packers, houses, slave girls or slaves – whatever Assur-taklaku has left belongs to Assur-imitti. Do not appropriate anything! If you have already taken anything belonging to the man, then release it to Assur-idi's representative.³

The complexity of the Old Assyrian legal system is reflected in many practical procedures that involved institutions in both Assur and the colonies and which gave rise to a wealth of documents of different types. In this chapter I shall illustrate some of the fundamental practices, ideas and aims of the system by way of a detailed analysis of a single legal conflict which arose from the death of a merchant.⁴ Obviously, for the family and for many other people in the society, this was an event of major importance, and a few dossiers of connected texts provide elaborate information about the aftermath. I have already touched upon the topic in my brief discussion of the legal problems after the death of Shalim-Assur's older brother Iddin-abum, and here I shall be concerned with some further examples, but in particular what happened after Shalim-Assur himself had died. These matters took up a large amount of time and energy in the various judicial institutions and provide us with illustrative material for an understanding of the legal system.

As can be seen from the case of Assur-taklaku, the very first action to be taken related to the question of who was responsible for the settlement of the estate, and especially where this was to take place. The decision of the city assembly was concerned with the correct procedure to be followed, stipulating that his assets had to be brought to Assur, where the final accounting would take place and the creditors paid. This was standard practice designed to prevent local creditors from laying their hands on whatever assets they could find, in that way disrupting the proper division of the estate. This is explained clearly in a letter from Pushu-ken's sister Tarish-matum, who writes together with a woman called Belatum:

We have sent an attorney, and the attorney has in his possession a letter from the City which is authoritative, saying that no one either in the city or abroad must interfere, and that Shu-Nunu's money must be collected in the city. There they will divide the inheritance in accordance with their testament. Anyone who interferes abroad will be considered a thief with respect to every shekel of silver that he takes.⁵

These texts show what must have been the normal procedure, and it is understandable that everything had to take place in Assur, for the dead merchant would have had a joint-stock fund which had to be regulated there, much of his family and many of his partners, agents and creditors would have lived there and the general complexity of his business would probably in many instances have meant that the city assembly had to become involved. On the other hand, this was a cumbersome set of procedures that threatened to introduce delays, something the heirs would want to avoid. In

situations where less important traders died, their assets would be secured by others, apparently not always in entirely honourable operations. And in the case of a major businessman's death, his debtors and creditors in the colonies would attempt to gain access to his archives in order to secure the documents concerning their own involvement. Unless a really sharp operator got hold of money and tablets, the contents of the strongroom would be entrusted to a reliable person for safe keeping and eventually sent to Assur.

Even in cases where the right procedures had been initiated, problems could arise when too smart people interfered. The death around year 110 of a certain Puzur-Assur, who had been a "partner of Pushu-ken's house", led to a series of controversies because the assets came into the hands of the apparently unscrupulous Buzazu.⁶ As a partner of Pushu-ken, Puzur-Assur had left a considerable correspondence that shows their close relationship, which also involved investments in each other's joint-stock partnerships. He survived Pushu-ken by a few years and became involved especially with Pushu-ken's son Buzazu and a certain Ili-wedaku, as reflected in a number of letters. It seems that the two junior partners did not get along, for their letters are full of accusations and complaints. This relationship became even more problematic when Puzur-Assur died.

Before Puzur-Assur's death, a problem had arisen concerning a large amount of copper stored in the town Wahshushana. Buzazu claimed that Ili-wedaku was literally lying on it, hoarding it for himself, and exactly the same was being said about Buzazu by a third man in a letter to the boss Puzur-Assur.⁷ It is hard to know what to believe. This matter was still unresolved when Puzur-Assur died, and the two agents transferred their disagreement to the matter of the correct way to dispose of the valuables left by him.

The first thing that happened was that Puzur-Assur's investors entered his storeroom and removed its contents, and everything was entrusted to a certain Enna-Suen for safe keeping. He was told not to release any of it as long as the investors and customers were in negotiation. One assumes that the next step would have been to transfer all the goods to Assur.

However, Buzazu, as one of the investors, got mixed up in the affair and claimed the valuables, which he sent to Assur for purchases; as a result Puzur-Assur's sons hired an attorney in Assur and went with him to Kanesh, where they confronted Enna-Suen before witnesses:

"Against god's will our father has died, and at our father's death his investors removed twelve boxes with tablets, sealed silver, sealed gold and two sacks with copper. The silver, gold and copper were in the strongroom

under our father's seal. The investors of our father's house went in and entrusted it to you. To whom have you given all this?"

Enna-Suen said: "One of your father's investors arrived from Wahshushana, and I entrusted all this to Buzazu. He has said to me as follows: 'Out of the silver and gold I paid what had to be paid of your father's expenses, and the rest of the silver, 37 pounds, I entrusted to Assur-shamshi. He brought it to the City and goods have come up here which have been entrusted to Kulumaya. Go and take your goods!'"

Enna-Suen continued: "Do not make any claims on me!"

The attorney and Puzur-Assur's sons answered: "We shall not make claims against you. We shall sue Buzazu to whom you entrusted it."⁸

Buzazu had overstepped his authority and somehow convinced Enna-Suen that he was permitted to continue Puzur-Assur's activities, whereas the other investors had made it clear that they were to be frozen until a settlement had been achieved. This led to the sons' activities, but also Ili-wedaku interfered and dragged Buzazu before witnesses, claiming that he had appropriated the goods that had come back from Assur and that part of this shipment in fact belonged to him personally. Buzazu maintained that the matter was out of his hands and that Ili-wedaku should discuss the matter with the sons of Puzur-Assur.

It is not known how the affair ended, but we can assume that Puzur-Assur's heirs were eventually able to collect their inheritance. It was probably an atypical case, not only because of Buzazu's interference and Ili-wedaku's claims, but especially because it appears that the tablets from the archive were not taken to Assur and that the city assembly there was not involved in the final aspects of the controversy. The appeal at a later stage to the assembly by the sons and the sending of an attorney from Assur were, on the other hand, standard procedure.

Some of the same elements can be found in the very elaborate documentation concerning the death of Shalim-Assur, the central figure in the archive from 1994 that I am publishing. More than one hundred texts of different kinds refer to this affair, which started as a fairly simple problem but quickly developed into a highly complex lawsuit involving the heirs.⁹ As already mentioned, Shalim-Assur spent his last years in the town Durhumit, where he was involved in the lucrative Anatolian trade in copper and wool. His house in Kanesh did contain a large archive of almost 1,200 documents, but the texts that could throw light on the last years of his activities must have been stored in his house in Durhumit. His oldest son Ennam-Assur lived in the family house in Kanesh together with his

Anatolian wife Anna-anna, and the younger brother Ali-ahum seems to have travelled a great deal. Where his house was and where his Assyrian wife Ishtar-lamassi lived is not known.

One of the first texts written after the death of the father is a letter from Ali-ahum and a friend of the family to Ennam-Assur:

Against the god's will our father has died.

It is no longer Shalim-Assur who is our father, it is you who are our father.

Take care of our father's matters there and clear them up. Do not have any of our father's business transferred here. One or two of our investors are staying here.

Our dear father and lord, clear it up.¹⁰

Apparently the younger son is happy to recognise his brother as the new boss, and he leaves it to him to take care of the family's affairs in Kanesh. The letter was sent from Durhumit, and the presence of a couple of investors there does not seem to cause any alarm, although it is possible that the desire not to have anything sent to Durhumit could be explained by a wish not to place anything into their hands.

Ali-ahum seems to have gone to Kanesh next to help his brother, and together they approached the colony to have a couple of men, who were in debt to Shalim-Assur, extradited to Kanesh in order to answer questions before witnesses. One of these cases concerns an investment in a joint-stock fund that they want transferred to a former eponym in Assur to whom Shalim-Assur was indebted. The two brothers appear to collaborate in their attempts to establish precisely how much the father has left, what debts they have to contend with and who may owe money to the estate. A lot of the uncertainty is connected to various deals concerning copper. Working with a few of the close business connections of the family, Ali-ahum manages to reach a preliminary agreement with the investors in Durhumit.

Everything was not entirely satisfactory, however, for Ennam-Assur expressed concern that his brother was being unduly influenced by outsiders: "Urgent – do not listen to others all the time! Why do you constantly listen to what strangers are saying?"¹¹

A year had passed already, and now investors and customers in Durhumit and Kanesh seized large amounts of copper and detained the two brothers on the basis of claims on the estate. Apparently there was no end in sight, so the two brothers turned to their representatives in Assur to get them to obtain permission from the city assembly to hire an attorney who could come to Anatolia and help them in their difficulties. One of the serious issues was that Shalim-Assur was indebted for a large amount of silver to the Assur temple and to an eponym, which must mean that the suggestion that

the investment in a joint-stock partnership be converted to a payment to the eponym had not been followed. The investors and creditors in Kanesh were clearly not happy with the idea that these debts to authorities in the capital should be paid before they could get anything.

It appears that an attorney was sent out and that in fact he did help the heirs in their conflict with the investors, but by this time the brothers had already fallen out and had completely different ideas about how to reach a final agreement. Ennam-Assur repeatedly asked his younger brother to arrange a meeting with colleagues and friends in order to reach a mediated solution. Ali-ahum refused. Ennam-Assur then suggested that they approach the four investors in their father's partnership fund who were in Anatolia: "[L]et us set them straight and let us please our father's customers – and then let us go to the city to our sister, the priestess, and let us clear ourselves in accordance with our father's will that is in the city."¹² Ennam-Assur still wished to have a mediated solution, now with the attorney as a witness to the deal.

However, Ali-ahum had another plan. Already in the very first report Ennam-Assur received from Durhumit, sent by a certain Itur-ili who has already appeared in other controversies, he was told that the father "spoke his will",¹³ and it became clear later that his words were recorded on a tablet in the presence of Ali-ahum. On the other hand, the father had also left a testament in Assur, and the question was now which one of these documents should regulate the division of the estate.

The many close associates of the family who had until now acted on behalf of both brothers were increasingly under pressure to choose sides. One of the best known of these, a certain Man-mahir who lived in the copper-producing region, wrote to Ennam-Assur:

Ali-ahum wrote to me and said: "If any of what my father gave to you is still in your possession, do not release it to my brother. If you do release it, I and my sister will sue you in this matter." Moreover, his representatives have set witnesses against me.¹⁴

Also Ennam-Assur's wife Anna-anna wrote of suspicious behaviour on the part of Ali-ahum, who had the support of their sister Lamassi in Assur; she is said to have taken the valuables in the family's house there and placed them in the hands of Ali-ahum – that is, given them to his representatives in the capital. But the decisive piece of news for Ennam-Assur came in a letter from a friend in Assur who wrote:

Ali-ahum has written to his representatives, saying: "Hire an attorney for me in the city so I can question Ennam-Assur in an oral discussion on the basis of the tablet stating how much I and my brother owe to our father."

Ennam-Assur was warned to clear himself before the attorney arrived and leave Kanesh, but he felt obliged to send a letter of his own to a couple of acquaintances in Assur, asking them to approach the city-assembly on his behalf:

Get a tablet with a verdict of the City stating that the tablet that was entrusted to Iliya (in Durhumit) is invalid, and that the sons of Shalim-Assur shall go to the City with the attorney and debate on the basis of their testament (which is) in the city....

If an opponent of your plea appears there in the assembly, then drag Shu-Tammuzi, Elaya and Adida, who have been lying on my father's testament there, and who have sealed the document, drag them to the assembly there, so they may make statements to the City.¹⁵

The three men named as those who had the testament were Shalim-Assur's regular representatives in Assur, and it is now clear that the entire family there had chosen to ally themselves with the younger brother. Ennam-Assur was therefore forced to rely on the help of people who were really strangers, men who do not otherwise appear in any of the texts in the archive. This must have been a very uncomfortable, even alarming situation for him.

The city assembly now had to decide which brother was right and which last will should be the basis for further negotiations and decisions. Their verdict was unequivocal, as we are told in a letter from one of Ali-ahum's associates who had been sent to Assur with letters to Lamassi:

In accordance with your instructions that you gave me, we assisted your sister, confronted the city assembly, and according to the tablet from the City that we then received, Shalim-Assur's daughter will hire an attorney, and with respect to the silver, the tablets and the tablet written by Shalim-Assur concerning the debt of Ennam-Assur and Ali-ahum, which the investors entrusted to Iliya in Durhumit – Ennam-Assur and Ali-ahum must pay their debts in accordance with this tablet that Shalim-Assur wrote, give the silver to the attorney and have it go to the City. Now, a second copy of the tablet (has been made), and we have hired Ababa as the attorney with me as a witness.¹⁶

At this point the older brother appeared to have been defeated, and he withdrew into what looks like a deep depression. Four of his associates, including his brother, wrote a letter to ask him to snap out of it and face reality:

Why are you lying around there where there is neither father nor mother, making the disease worse? Instead of going down to the temple here,

asking mercy from the god, praying constantly to your god, so that brother and friend could give you encouragement, you have sat there for a whole year as an empty man, without purpose or wishes.

Your father's investors here offer those things to your brother which you earlier asked for constantly, but since your brother is alone, he obviously cannot agree to anything on your behalf.¹⁷

It was now two years since the father had died, and the attorney Ababa arrived in Kanesh and summoned the brothers to answer questions before witnesses. He had a clear agenda, defined by the decision taken by the city assembly, and he put it to the two that they should pay him what they owed according to the memorandum written by Shalim-Assur. We have a series of texts recording these encounters, and they stand as examples of the way in which such a case would be conducted in Kanesh. We can see that the negotiations went on for a long time without a satisfactory solution being reached. One of the earliest meetings is recorded as follows:

The attorney of Shalim-Assur's firm Ababa seized us (as witnesses) and made us approach Ennam-Assur and Ali-ahum. He said: "According to the tablet of the City I must collect all that Shalim-Assur left behind and bring it to the City. Come now, show me the outstanding claims left by your father and anything else he left behind; then I shall assist you so they release it to you, and we can go to the City.

Yesterday I questioned you in these words: "Pay whatever silver your father set down as owed by you and then let us go to the City."

Your brother Ali-ahum answered: "OK, let me pay what silver my father wrote in the memorandum, and then let us go to the City."

But you keep giving me harsh answers instead of paying the money, and indeed you refuse to pay. Do not obstruct me, but show me where your father's outstanding claims are. Let me assist you and let us have the money paid so we can go to the City. Your brother Ali-ahum shows me the silver his father wrote in the tablet, but you refuse to pay the silver your father wrote about you in the memorandum, and in that way you obstruct me.

Come on now, pay whatever your father wrote concerning you in the tablet in accordance with the tablet of the City. Let us go to the City. Do not obstruct me."

Ennam-Assur answered the attorney Ababa: "I submit to the tablet of the City and the attorney of my Lord. Yesterday you questioned me and I answered you with these words:

'At my father's death in Durhumit I was not present. My brother Ali-ahum assisted our father. They appropriated things illegally, and my father wrote

many things about me. But I do not owe anything to my father of what is in that tablet.'

Now, let us go to Durhumit where my father's assets are, let us take these assets and then let us go to the City together with you in accordance with the tablet of the City, let us satisfy the eponym and let me discuss the testament of our father in the city together with my brother and sister.

If you say: 'I will not go to Durhumit,' then state that formally to me, and then let us leave for the city even today. Do not question me in court. I have not rejected the idea of going.'¹⁸

The younger brother is obviously the agreeable one who declares his willingness to follow to the letter the instructions and orders of the attorney – which is not surprising, since those orders were formulated in complete agreement with his own wishes. Ennam-Assur's position is more problematic, since he refuses to do what the attorney asks him to, and he therefore in fact declined to follow the guidelines laid out by the city assembly. He professes every time to submit to the authority of the letter from the City and the attorney appointed by the king, but his interpretation of the orders issued is not entirely straightforward.

On the other hand, his argument that they should proceed to Durhumit, because that is where they could gain a clear perspective on the state of affairs of the father's business, seems entirely reasonable. He seems to imply that it would be legally incorrect for Ababa to refuse to go to Durhumit, and in the end the attorney saw no alternative but to do precisely that. Ali-ahum refused to go, so the negotiations that took place there were conducted in his stead by his local representative.

In Durhumit the attorney engaged in a series of meetings with a man called Iddin-Assur, to whom the investors earlier had entrusted a large amount of copper belonging to the dead father, and he confronted Man-mahir, who owed copper and lapis lazuli to the estate. It seems that these affairs went well, but the documentation is somewhat scanty on this point. It is now three years after Shalim-Assur's death, and in the summer of that year disaster struck. First Ennam-Assur wrote a jubilant letter to his friends in which he announced that he had in effect won the suit, but the success was short-lived, for he had taken a business trip to the town Tawniya and there he was murdered and robbed. The ensuing conflict over the payment of blood money for him has already been discussed.¹⁹ In the late autumn Ali-ahum wrote a letter to his supporters in Assur explaining the way things had developed in the case, and he said that even after Ennam-Assur's death his creditors were still detaining him. He concludes:

As my brother died, we sent the tablet of the City and the attorney Ababa back. Dear brothers, have them annul the tablet of the City of which Ababa brought a copy, then go to the assembly and have the City hear this letter and take it.

I shall come in six months, and as for the fact that they detain me as well as my outstanding claims, I shall clear myself and come.²⁰

This letter was meant for the city assembly's official archive, probably kept in City Hall, and Ali-ahum writes rather formally in recognition of the role of the text as the final word. Ababa was paid 2 pounds, 15 shekels of silver for his efforts and sent home.

This series of events is documented by an unparalleled number of texts, and yet it seems clear that many more must have existed, for some of the crucial moments are not attested. Several of the texts that describe events in Kanesh are in fact archive copies, not the original documents, and this indicates to me that all of the judicial evidence was collected, together with the tablets from Shalim-Assur's archive in Durhumit, and sent to Assur.

As an example of the procedures initiated by the death of a prominent merchant, this dossier of texts can be compared with several other similar, though less elaborate groups of documents that reflect the legal conflicts caused by such a situation. A general framework for the settlement of an estate can be presented as follows:

- 0: A formal testament is drawn up, or the man speaks his last will
- 1: Preparations – initial legal arrangements
 - A. Acknowledgement of the new paterfamilias
 - B. Appointment of an executor (*bēl šīmātīm*)
 - C. Assessment of debit and credit
 - D. Freezing assets and transactions of the estate
- 2: Collection of assets (liquidation)
 - A. Debts collected
 - B. Assets in Anatolia sold for silver and sent to Assur
 - C. All assets collected in Assur
 - D. Special rights enjoyed by heirs superseding rights of creditors
 - E. A verdict and the appointment of an attorney
- 3: Final settlement with creditors
 - A. Creditors paid in accordance with their status:
 - i. Public institutions and officials
 - ii. Investors of joint-stock contracts
 - iii. Other creditors

- 4: Division of inheritance
 - A. Supervised by executor and settled in accordance with testament
 - B. Immediate distribution of shares in the inheritance
 - C. Suspended distribution of shares
 - i. Until particular stipulations in the testament were met
 - ii. Until particular agreements with creditors were satisfied

Obviously, this schema was not strictly enforced in all cases, and there would often be special problems with creditors who were unwilling to wait for their money while these procedures were being carried out.

When the brothers first negotiated with the investors, they could do so with the special rights that were enjoyed by heirs, being *mer'u mētim*, “sons of the dead person”. This meant that they had the right to procedural delays of up to a whole year, during which time they could collect outstanding debts, gather evidence to prove that perceived claims had been satisfied, in some instances hire an attorney and acquire verdicts from the city assembly. It seems that the brothers somehow forfeited these rights, either because the time limit ran out or perhaps because they began to quarrel with each other and no longer presented a united front. One option open to them was therefore mediation with the help of “brothers and friends”, namely insiders who were related to the affairs of the family; or they could involve outsiders, persons who could be impartial because they had no relation to any of the parties involved. This was the strategy suggested several times by Ennam-Assur, and it is known from many documents that mediation was a common procedure. It was a voluntary, informal process during which the parties retained the right to withdraw from the negotiations.

The next step could be arbitration, where the parties had to submit to the authority of a group of persons who could be seen as the extension of the formal legal system, having coercive power. That procedure was also commonly applied, although not in this particular case.

When these strategies turned out not to be possible in this conflict, the only option left was to turn to the city assembly in Assur, whose verdicts defined the overall parameters of the settlement. Many decisions could be taken in Anatolia, but the important ones had to be dealt with by the authorities in Assur. The brothers could appeal to the Kanesh colony to have certain debtors transferred by force in order to appear in court and answer questions. The colonies could appoint witnesses to many negotiations, and all these procedures were unproblematic. The relationship between the authorities in Assur and those in the colonies was clearly expressed in the

statement found in some of the letters from the City, where we read that “the colony will be the executive power of the attorney.”

The attorney is an important institution, inherited from the practices introduced during the time of the Ur III Empire, where these men appear to be troubleshooters of some kind sent out from the central administration.²¹ In its Old Assyrian form, it represents an interesting blend of public and private features. The right to hire an attorney was based on a verdict by the city assembly, and the king appointed him, but he was paid by the people whose interests he represented. There are cases where an attorney fell out with his employers, and we even have a suit against an attorney, based on the claim that he had not pursued the matter in the proper way.²² The lawsuit analysed here shows that both heirs formally accepted the authority of the attorney, but the many texts recording his questioning of the brothers also indicate the limitations of his power, since he could not force the older brother to follow the orders contained in the decision of the City, and it is remarkable that in the end he chose to accept the argument put forward by Ennam-Assur, even though it went directly against the orders given to him by the city assembly.

A complex lawsuit in the aftermath of the death of a prominent merchant would probably always have to be dealt with by the city assembly, for in such cases the men and women in both Anatolia and Assur would have a direct interest, much more than would be the case in more ordinary court cases involving commercial and legal issues dividing the men in Anatolia. The leading members of the dead man’s extended family would be in the capital, where the ancestral house, the *bēt abini*, was located, and he would have had a joint-stock fund which was always regulated in Assur, where most of the investors would have lived.

The absolute authority of the city assembly created a powerful need for the men in Anatolia to have the support of well-placed partners and friends in the capital. In the early stages of the negotiations, the two brothers wrote letters to the family’s representatives, led by their sister, but when the conflict escalated and this group of people decided to support Ali-ahum, Ennam-Assur was forced to turn to persons outside the circle of family and associates for help. It is clearly for this reason that his letter ends with the plea:

Take care to assist La-qep and obtain a tablet from the City. We are also men capable of doing favours, and we shall then show you one!

Personal relations and status obviously played a central role in such conflicts. This dossier, like many other texts from Kanesh, shows some of the

fundamental structures that defined the legal system, and it may be said that the quest for justice was pursued relentlessly, the search for a solution based on traditions and legal customs known to probably all members of this society, even though the precise formulation in each concrete case would give rise to disagreement.